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ABSTRACT

This document presents the transcript of a hearing before the House Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness concerning the implementation of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 and the future role of the federal government in this area. Highlights of the testimony include state assistive technology projects, provision of low-interest loans for individuals with disabilities to purchase assistive technology, the current process of fading out federal aid under the Act, and needs of states losing funding under the Act's sunset provisions. Statements are included of Representative Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, Committee Chairman; Representative Patsy T. Mink, Ranking Minority Member; Mark Schultz, Director, Assistive Technology Partnership, Nebraska Department of Education; Paul Rasinski, Executive Director, Maryland Technology Assistance Program; William Ward, Executive Director, Independent Empowerment Center (Virginia); and Carol Novak, a parent in Tampa, Florida. Appendices include more extensive written statements by the presenters and additional documents submitted for the record. (DB)

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ASSESSING THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

HEARING HELD IN WASHINGTON, DC, MARCH 21, 2002

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HEARING ON ASSESSING THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998

Thursday, March 21, 2002

U.S. House of Representatives,

Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness,

Committee on Education and the Workforce,

Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:30 a.m., in Room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Howard ``Buck" McKeon [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives McKeon, Isakson, Osborne, Mink, Tierney, Rivers, and Hinojosa.

Also present: Representative Hoyer.

Staff present: Blake Hegeman, Legislative Assistant; Charles Hokanson, Professional Staff; Sally Lovejoy, Director of Education and Human Resources Policy; Patrick Lyden, Professional Staff Member; Krisann Pearce, Deputy Director of Education and Human Resources Policy; Whitney Rhoades, Professional Staff Member; Deborah L. Samantar, Committee Clerk/Intern Coordinator; Heather Valentine, Press Secretary; Mark Zuckerman, Minority General Counsel; Joe Novotny, Minority Staff Assistant/Education; and Brendan O'Neil, Minority Legislative Associate/Education.

Chairman McKeon. A quorum being present, the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness will come to order.

I apologize to those of you who were here at 10:00. We had a little mix-up in the timing, but I appreciate you all being very prompt.

We are meeting today to hear testimony on assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. Under committee rule 12(b), opening statements are limited to the chairman and ranking minority member of the subcommittee. Therefore, if other members have statements, they will be included in the record.

With that, I ask unanimous consent for the hearing record to remain open 14 days to allow member statements and other extraneous material referenced during the hearing to be submitted in the official hearing record.

Without objection, so ordered.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Good morning, again. We have a full audience. We appreciate all of you coming here. I know some of you have come from a long way to be here with us, and we appreciate that.

As a Congress, we finished up our voting for the week yesterday. So, fortunately, we will not be interrupted with any votes, and we can pay full attention to your testimonies. That is a good thing.

Thank you for joining us for this important hearing today to hear testimony on the achievements of the assistive technology programs funded under the federal Assistive Technology Act of 1998, the AT Act, and on what should be the future federal role in this area.

Today, all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, have a State Assistive Technology Project funded under Title I of the AT Act.

These state AT Projects provide a variety of services and programs, such as information and referral services, assessment for appropriate assistive technology, equipment demonstration and buy-out, and refurbished assistive technology equipment.

The federal grants to these state AT Projects are administered through the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research at the U.S. Department of Education.

Earlier this week, my staff and I toured the District of Columbia assistive technology resource center to learn more about how the center works with the AT Act.

It was a very informative visit, and we learned how the Center handles referrals from various government agencies and how the Center works with a child, student, or adult to find out what services and equipment work best for them. I want to thank those members of that organization that gave us that tour. I appreciate their efforts.

We also saw and observed demonstrations of many of the devices that are used by those needing assistive technology. In addition to the state AT Projects funded under Title I of the AT Act, Title III provides federal assistance for state alternative financing programs, such as low-interest loan programs offered through the state AT Projects and local or regional banks that assist individuals with disabilities seeking to purchase assistive technology at a cost they can afford.

Currently, 32 states offer financial loan programs that provide loans at low-interest rates to individuals with disabilities. Sixteen of these loan programs are funded under Title III of the AT Act.

Assistive technology typically purchased through these programs include vans or vehicle modifications, wheelchairs, adapted computers and other equipment that assists individuals with disabilities in obtaining or maintaining employment or in increasing their mobility or adaptability in a home, school, or community environment.

One important reason for holding this hearing is to gather information that will help this subcommittee assess whether these federal assistive technology programs, especially the state grant programs funded under Title I, have fulfilled their original purpose.

When Congress first acted in 1988 to provide technology-related assistance for individuals with disabilities, it created a 10-year state grants program to provide seed money to establish systems within each state for improving access to assistive technology for individuals with disabilities.

Many now argue that the state grants programs now operating in every state have fulfilled the Act's mandate to increase access to, availability of, and funding for assistive technology through state efforts and national initiatives.

More specifically, the 1994 amendments to the 1988 act included an explicit sunset provision indicating that federal funding would begin to decrease in the final three years of the program, and would completely cease at the end of 10 full years of funding.

States were to take fiscal responsibility for these programs when federal funding ceased, and have known this now for eight years.

In 1998, Congress extended funding so the states that did not receive initial funding until 1994 could receive their full 10 years of funding under the AT Act.

States who had been in the program prior to 1994 were given three additional years of funding to continue meeting the federal mandate, allowing them additional time to address the significant changes in electronic technology for people with disabilities that were being developed in the late 1990s.

Under current law, federal funding phases out over the final two years of the program. First, it is reduced to 75 percent and then to 50 percent of the original funding level. This was done so as to encourage states to take responsibility for the state systems developed under the AT Act as federal funding was gradually phased out.

In fact, Mr. Goodling, the former chairman of this committee, felt very strongly that the Federal Government should only provide seed money for state system development, and that this program should not become another never-ending federal program.

This year, 23 states are scheduled to be eliminated from federal funding in this upcoming fiscal year. The President's 2003 budget request supports the sunset of these 23 state AT Projects, and does not include funding for them. The President, however, has included funding for programs under Title III of the AT Act of 1998, which provides funding for the alternative financing programs.

Many argue that 10 years is sufficient time for each state to have established a state system for technology access, and that states should no longer need funds for system development. At this point, they note the better use of federal funds is to support the revolving loan fund in Title III of the AT Act to help individuals with disabilities purchase assistive technology.

On the other hand, many believe that the Federal Government should continue to provide assistance to states, because technology - having it and being able to use it - has become a reality of daily life. This is something that we should explore with our witnesses here today.

Authorization for the AT Act of 1998 expires in fiscal year 2004, and this hearing is aimed to provide a sense of how states are doing in their efforts to develop State Assistive Technology Projects that successfully provide a system of services to individuals with disabilities.

During this hearing, we will hear from the directors of two of these state projects. In addition, we will hear from a consumer of assistive technology who obtained low-interest loans through a state loan fund authority.

Lastly, we will hear from an assistive technology policy expert, who is also the mother of an adult son who uses assistive technology, about her recommendations for the future of the AT Act of 1998.

The subcommittee welcomes your insights. I am sure the witnesses' testimonies will be invaluable as we continue to examine assistive technology issues.

With that, I would like to recognize Congresswoman Mink for her opening statement.

WRITTEN OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C. – SEE APPENDIX A

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER PATSY T. MINK, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mrs. Mink. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, want to join you in welcoming our panel of witnesses today, and I look forward to your testimony.

This is the first hearing on this subject in nine years, and I am pleased that this subcommittee will have a chance to hear about the assistive technology act before its legislative sunset in 2004.

I want to particularly thank the chairman for calling this hearing, and for his interest in this subject area. This act makes a significant difference in the lives of millions of people in our country. Fifty-four million Americans have some type of disability, and roughly thirty-four million use assistive devices.

Assistive technology helps people with disabilities by expanding their educational opportunities, integrating them into the workforce, and allowing them to participate in community affairs.

Assistive technology is any equipment that is used to increase or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. The definition includes a wide array of equipment and services.

Accessibility will involve the use of specialized computer keyboards, screen readers, screen enlargers, motorized wheelchairs, speech recognition software, and many, many more items.

As the chairman has already gone through the explanation of the legislative history and the sunset provisions, I will skip over that and ask unanimous consent, Mr. Chairman, to have my entire statement put in the record.

The sunset provision is a disaster, because it will halt the contributions of the Federal Government to a very, very important program. It is not something which cannot be described as a task finished by the Federal Government. It is only beginning, and it needs this support to continue.

Every year, new individuals become disabled, and become in need of this assistance for their survival, for their education, for their entry into the workplace. So it would be extremely shortsighted for this congress to permit it to be sunsetted.

So this hearing is really very crucial for the congress and members of this committee to understand the importance of this program and the tremendous progress that has been made in the states that participate.

My state is to be sunsetted in the year 2004, and the leadership of my community has implored me and the committee and others in their communications not to let the sunset occur. If the 23 states are allowed to sunset this year, then surely the rest will fall. And so this year's determination is especially crucial.

Mr. Chairman, I have letters here that I have received from a number of state entities and other organizations, and I would ask unanimous consent that this collection of letters be inserted in the record at this point.

Chairman McKeon. So ordered.

LETTERS REGARDING THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY RANKING MEMBER PATSY T. MINK, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C. – SEE APPENDIX B

Mrs. Mink. The administration's explanation of defunding it, I think, is really the point that we have to address this year, in the appropriations process.

So, I am really pleased that we are joined here in this committee today, Mr. Chairman, by one of our, how shall we say it, cardinals of our appropriations committee, because he certainly will be in the forefront of our efforts to save this program, and to continue the progress that it has made for many, many families.

And I will ask that my entire statement, Mr. Chairman, be included in the record at this point. Thank you.

WRITTEN OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER PATSY T. MINK, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C. – SEE APPENDIX C

Chairman McKeon. So ordered. Thank you very much.

You know, we usually do not introduce people in the audience, but we were bribed by a couple of people from Idaho with these Idaho pins.

[Laughter.]

Chairman McKeon. I would like to introduce Dan Brownell and Bernie Henschied, and thank you for the bribe. I love Idaho potatoes.

Mrs. Mink. I need two for earrings.

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Chairman McKeon. Mrs. Mink says she needs two, because she wants to wear them for earrings. Here is another one.

[Laughter.]

Chairman McKeon. And Laura Williams, from California, drove all the way here in her van, and we are happy to have her here, as we are all of you.

I know it is not easy to overcome some of the difficulties you have had to cope with in your lives, and we really appreciate you making the effort to be here. We are very happy to have - I don't think he is a cardinal, I think he would love to be a cardinal, and if something disastrous happened in the next election, and the Democrats won the majority, he would be cardinal.

But we are really happy to have Mr. Hoyer here, because he is a strong advocate, and I am sure he will be very helpful in assuring whatever we need help with in this program, as we go forward.

We are happy to have him join us here, even though he is not a member of the committee. We all bow down to the appropriators, and we are happy to have him with us.

Our witnesses are from some of our committee members' districts, so we will ask Mr. Osborne to introduce Mr. Schultz, and we will ask Mr. Hoyer to introduce Mr. Rasinski. I will introduce Mr. Ward, and Mr. Isakson will introduce Ms. Novak. Mr. Osborne?

Mr. Osborne. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to introduce Mark Schultz to you today, who has served as Director of the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership since 1989.

The Assistive Technology Partnership provides information on locating funding for assistive devices and home modifications, and assists persons with disabilities in the areas of employment, independent living, education, and housing.

In his 13 years as the head of the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, Mr. Schultz has been a strong advocate for persons with disabilities. Under his leadership, the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership has grown into a model for other states.

I am pleased that Mr. Schultz is here today to discuss the role that the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership has played in implementing the Assistive Technology Act in Nebraska.

Welcome, Mark, and we look forward to hearing your testimony.

Chairman McKeon. Mr. Hoyer?

Mr. Hoyer. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for giving me an opportunity to appear. I was going to sit down there, but there was no microphone, so I came up here, and I appreciate the invitation. I want to thank you.

I want to thank Mrs. Mink, the ranking member, like me, a chairman-in-waiting, for her comments. And I want to thank Mr. Isakson and Mr. Osborne for being here, as well. Both of them are very involved and very effective members of our House, and I appreciate that.

As you may know, Mr. Chairman, I have been working to increase funding for assistive technology in my role as a member of the Appropriations Committee. And we, as you know, continued for nine states last year's funding.

That could not have been done, Mr. Chairman, without your help, and I very much appreciate that, and I know all the folks here appreciate that, as well, both you and Mrs. Mink were critical.

I also circulated a letter to our colleagues last year, and sent a letter to the chairman of the full committee, Mr. Boehner, and he was helpful, as well. So he is not here, but I wish you would pass along my appreciation, and I know the appreciation of everybody here today.

I am thankful that we are here today, focusing on the important program in learning about the assistive technology program, and discussing its future. You made the observation that it was tough for some people to get here. But it was made much easier by assistive technology in a lot of different forms.

For many people with disabilities, access to assistive technology is the difference, as you know, Mr. Chairman, from being able to communicate and not being able to do so; being able to dress themselves in the morning, and not being able to; to being able to become self-sufficient and being dependent. So this is a critical issue for, literally, millions of Americans.

Paul Rasinski, who is the Executive Director of the Maryland Technology Assistance Program, was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. After graduating from Coppin State College, also in Baltimore, he began his career in education as an industrial arts instructor in the Baltimore City School System.

Paul sustained a spinal cord injury in a sports accident, and spent many years rehabilitating his physical health, and endeavoring to develop a new career.

In 1993, Mr. Chairman, Paul joined the staff of the Maryland Technology Assistance Program as the education liaison. The position entails, among other responsibilities, assisting parents and educators in the proper selection and use of assistive technology for the individual education plans of children with disabilities.

Paul was promoted to assistant director in 1996, and on July 1, 1997, assumed the position of executive director of Maryland TAP. He has directed the initiation of programs such as the AT co-op, that performs as an assistive technology procurement agent for school systems throughout the state, and the Maryland AT guaranteed loan program, which you referenced and Mrs. Mink referenced at the federal level, that provides guarantees of loans to purchase assistive technology to enable citizens of Maryland with disabilities to participate in the promise of our society.

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Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have such a dedicated spokesperson from the State of Maryland before this subcommittee, and thank you for this opportunity.

Chairman McKeon. Mr. William Ward is the Executive Director of the Independent Empowerment Center. Before becoming Executive Director in 1999, he served as a Peer Counselor with the Center.

Mr. Ward currently serves on the Statewide Independent Living Council in Virginia, and volunteers with the Manassas Disabilities Services Board. He holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Personnel Management from George Mason University.

We're happy to have you with us, Mr. Ward. Mr. Isakson?

Mr. Isakson. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is really a treat for me to introduce Carol Hughes Novak today, who is going to testify, and to welcome all those testifying.

I thought last night, when I finally got to my apartment, how was I going to introduce a lady who has really become truly one of my very best friends? I decided the best way to do that was to introduce her son, Jonathan, who is here today. Jonathan and I were chatting before this. So, Jonathan, this is for you, Bud.

Carol and I met about 20 years ago, when we were seeking a handicapped, but accessible, playground in Marietta, Georgia, which I represented in the Georgia legislature, and I represent today in the Congress of the United States. That playground was built, and it's still usable today, and it was accessible for every child, regardless of their ability.

Later on, Carol and I became friends, and Jonathan and I became buddies. I watched him progress through the Cobb County public schools, and I watched him as an example of the great partnership of a loving parent and a compassionate government. And that is a great combination.

I had the distinct privilege, as chairman of the state board of education to grant a waiver so that, at the age of 22, Jonathan graduated from Wheeler High School in Marietta Georgia, with a B average. The only reason Jonathan needed a waiver was because of an absence of foreign language, which is often times granted in the public schools, as many of you in education know.

Jonathan is a great example of what we are talking about today. I have walked with Jonathan, assisted by his power wheelchair. Jonathan, in his accessible van, has traveled to political events, and he has traveled to educational events as a testimony to what assistive technology can do, and what a loving parent can do.

And today, Jonathan and I had a great conversation, thanks to his augmentative technology device.

His mom, Carol, is one of those that have walked the walk. She has made a difference in his life. She has ensured that he is more productive, and that he is independent.

And I can testify, because he is my friend, we have been together so many times, that Jonathan's life has been greatly enriched because of his mother, and because of the assistance from time to time of rehabilitation services that departments of education and the United States government have provided.

Jonathan is 25, just about to be 26. And although they moved from my district, because Carol recently married, I look forward to seeing them often, because they are, to me, a reminder, really, of why all of us are here, and that is to be of assistance to ensure that every American has the opportunity to live the most productive and independent life that they can. And to recognize that the cost of assisted technology is but a pittance compared to the cost of those that just wish to maintain somebody, rather than make them independent.

It is an honor and a privilege for me to introduce Carol to you today. And after you have heard her testimony, you will understand why her contribution to the lives of millions of Americans has been so great in the past, and will be in the future, as she advises this administration and this congress on the needs of those in assistive technology.

I welcome you, Carol, and I am glad to have you here today. You, too, Jonathan.

Chairman McKeon. Thank you very much. We will now hear from our witnesses. Those of you who are new here, you will see those lights in front of you. And when your five minutes starts - we will put your full testimonies in the record - but you have five minutes to talk.

When the green light comes on, your five minutes starts. When you have one minute left, it goes to yellow. And when your time is up, there is a trap door that opens when the red light comes on.

[Laughter.]

Chairman McKeon. I am just kidding. I do not think there is a trap door there, but we do not want to test and find out.

We will hear first, then, from Mr. Schultz.

STATEMENT OF MARK SCHULTZ, DIRECTOR, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP, NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Mr. Schultz. Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, my name is Mark Schultz. I am the Director of the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, one of the 50 states and 6 territories receiving federal funding from Title I of the Tech Act. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about our accomplishments and areas of improvement that we have been able to identify.

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Nebraska was one of the first nine states to receive a grant under the Tech Act, and is now in its 13th year of operations. While I am here to share information particular to Nebraska's progress, it is important to note that Tech Act projects across the country have developed a variety of diverse strategies and programs that comprise a national assistive technology infrastructure.

The flexibility of the Tech Act has allowed each state to prioritize their assistive technology system needs and uniquely develop strategies to meet those needs, as appropriate. The bottom line is that more and more of the 50 million individuals with a disability in the United States are getting and using assistive technology to live independently, to go to school, work, and participate in their communities than before the Tech Act was created.

The Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership is a collaboration that has resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive program of technology-related services for Nebraskans with disabilities.

Partnering agencies provide us with support through grants and contracts to provide public awareness, information and referral services, on-site technical assistance, a mobile assessment and evaluation service, funding coordination, training for their staff, equipment loans and equipment recycling, and funding for assistive technology devices and home modifications.

Some programs also have obtained quotes from contractors and vendors, authorized the work to be done, monitored the work, and inspected the completed work. The total amount of contracts and grants that we receive for implementation of this collaboration is about $850,000 a year. The federal Tech Act provides $379,000, which comprises about 31 percent of our budget.

During the last three years, non-Tech Act funds that were spent on equipment and home and work site modifications totaled more than $14.9 million. An additional $3.9 million in non-Tech Act funds were spent on assistive technology services, such as assessments and technical assistance. The $1.4 million of federal support through Title I, over the three-year period, has leveraged more than $18.7 million in funding for assistive technology in Nebraska.

But rather than dwell on all the statistics about what has been done in our state, I would like to tell you a story that I think demonstrates the success that can be achieved when programs have the strength of Tech Act coordination behind them.

Isela Galindo was born three months premature, and weighed one pound. Lack of oxygen to her brain caused multiple cranial hemorrhages. Today, at age 10, Isela experiences bone development problems, has little control of her hands, and uses a power wheelchair.

She lives in Bayard, Nebraska, which is a very rural part of our state. She lives there with her parents, Max and Alicia Galindo, and her brother and sister. The Galindos' two bedroom home was small, and not built to accommodate a wheelchair.

Alicia had to carry her daughter down a hallway, through a bedroom, and then into the small bathroom. The doorway was too narrow for Isela's wheelchair, and there was no space to maneuver, once inside. Alicia had to lift her daughter in and out of their claw foot bathtub. A back injury made it increasingly difficult for Alicia to lift her daughter, as she grew older and heavier.

An assessment of the family's needs with the Tech Act program determined that the only solution would be an accessible addition to their home. The family could not believe that that was possible.

Thanks to coordinated funding from the Tech Act program, resources were obtained from the Department of Economic Development in Nebraska, Health and Human Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation to provide over $18,000 to build an accessible bathroom/bedroom addition. The addition has adequate space to utilize a lift to assist Isela in and out of bed and her wheelchair.

And before she had her own room, she slept on the floor in her parents' bedroom, because there was not enough room for a lift to get close enough to any of the beds in the other rooms. And with two more children, they did not have any accessible space.

The roll-in shower with grab bars and hand-held shower made bathing easy and safe. According to one of the agencies involved, the experience of building the addition has helped the Galindo family plan for Isela's future.

The independence Isela has achieved is the first step towards her self-sufficiency as a teenager and as an adult. As an additional benefit, she now has space in her bedroom for a computer for school assignments. She was able to obtain that computer through our program's recycling program.

The state resources that we have used are targeted to specific populations, areas of the state, ages, or disability. The Tech Act knows no boundaries, which makes it the glue that holds these assorted programs together.

Without the federal funding to demonstrate the viability of assistive technology through modeling its services or pilot demonstrations, we will have no way to move beyond our current service delivery system.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my formal statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that members of this subcommittee may have. Thank you.

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARK SCHULTZ, DIRECTOR, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP, NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA - SEE APPENDIX D

Chairman McKeon. Thank you very much.

Mr. Rasinski?

STATEMENT OF PAUL RASINSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MARYLAND TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Mr. Rasinski. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts about our state programs funded by the Assistive Technology Act.

I want to especially thank you, Mr. McKeon, and you, Mrs. Mink, for your leadership on this issue. I also want to thank our representative from Maryland, Mr. Hoyer, for his outstanding efforts in trying to continue funding for the Tech Act.

I think I speak for many of us here today when I say that people with disabilities are pleased that you have called this hearing to begin an examination of this important program that serves so many Americans with disabilities across our country.

It has been almost a decade since the House of Representatives held a hearing on this law. So much has happened over that decade, both in terms of the accomplishments of the state grant programs and in the advances that we have seen in technology. Remember, a decade ago, people did not even know what e-mail was.

As the information age moves us forward with technology, and innovations in our schools, homes, and work places, we connect to a national information infrastructure. It is imperative that all citizens, including those that are elderly, and those with disabilities, be included in every way. The Federal Government has an important continuing role to play in ensuring that this happens.

State Tech Act Projects support and create a much-needed infrastructure within the states to ensure access for people across the country.

I would like to kind of move from reading this to you, and sort of give you an idea of what is in the future. We feel that when the Tech Act, if it is allowed to terminate, we wonder about folks who have a child who has been healthy and a good, productive student in school for 10 or 12 years, then suddenly has an accident causing brain trauma, maybe paralysis of some kind. Who will those parents go to?

Right now, they have probably not had any dealings with the Assistive Technology Act, or the program. But they are going to need somebody in that short instance that they find out that they have a disability, and they are going to have to find some way of connecting with the technology that they need.

There are senior citizens out there that are just realizing they can't climb the same set of stairs that they climbed for the last 40 years. Who will they go to?

There are employers out there who are starting to find resumes on the Internet, and they find out that they just can't get this person into their building, because the person has a disability. But in fact, that is the most important person they could have found for the job that they have to offer.

A lot of software products, a lot of computer-related jobs are being filled by persons with disabilities. We would like to be able to be in place to connect the businesses with these people.

Our program has created one of the Title III loan programs. Along with it, we created a non-profit organization that has been negotiating discount prices for assistive technology and special education software. We combined the two.

Now, a person can come to us, get an evaluation for the proper piece of equipment that they need, then turn that around, get a discount price from the cooperative buying program for that piece of equipment, and then they get a loan through our program at the same time.

So, we have the continuing - not only good for those folks, but also good for the economy at the same time - kinds of programs. We are initiating programs like this all the time. We do not wait for, or just continue with our INR programs, we know they are a valuable part of what has to be done, but at the same time, they are not the only thing.

In 2004, the Assistive Technology Act is scheduled for reauthorization by Congress. My colleagues and I in the state programs, and many other non-profit organizations around the country look forward to working with you to develop new ways to support access to technology for persons with disabilities.

We hope that you will ensure continued support for the programs in the 50 states and 6 territories. We believe that this is a federal leadership role, providing the infrastructure and the seed money that leverages the great range of programs and services that are critical to people with disabilities.

For example, the Title III programs are administered by Title I state grant programs. If the Title I programs disappear, who will provide those Title III programs?

We are most grateful to you for your leadership, on behalf of Americans with disabilities, who depend on assistive technology for independence, and their full participation in our society. Thank you very much.

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PAUL RASINSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MARYLAND TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND - SEE APPENDIX E

Chairman McKeon. Thank you.

Mr. Ward?

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM WARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INDEPENDENT EMPOWERMENT CENTER, MANASSAS, VIRGINIA

Mr. Ward. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Bill Ward, and I would like to take a few minutes to share my experiences with you about how the Virginia assistive technology system and the Virginia Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority have helped me.

On July 1, 1982, my life changed drastically when I had an accident, 20 years ago this year, that broke my neck and left me a C3-4 quadriplegic with a spinal cord injury, but I am alive to talk about it. I am alive to see my daughter graduate from the University of Virginia this coming year. All things are going well.

The first thing I think I need to talk about is the fact that what happened to me could happen to anyone up there, so you, too, could be a product and someone very much in need of assistive technology.

With me, I think it is hard to believe, at age 50, I could be a poster child for anything, but as I sit here, I think I feel like one. I have got the long straw I get at the Chinese restaurants, and the man-made, the one that was done by a rehab engineer, my little mouth sticks that I use, which is the old style.

I can go to Lowe's and buy my tubes to support it, Wal-Mart for my rack that holds up the paper so I could see it, and then my $17,000 wheelchair with cell phones connected and speakerphones, et cetera, et cetera. Plus, my van is lift-equipped and has electric lock-down on the floor.

These came about, but I would like to take a couple of seconds to talk about my life before technology. Without all the technology I had, I was relegated in my transfers and travel to using a sliding board for transfers, requiring at least two people to drive me somewhere.

Now, someone can drive me, it doesn't have to be a particularly healthy individual, as long as they have a valid driver's license. So, I am more concerned about their driving ability these days, than their masculinity, or their ability and strength.

I was using a manual wheelchair that had to be disassembled, folded, and placed in the trunk. This great deal of planning on my part, and effort by people that worked with me made it a lot different, and they would have to think a lot more carefully about when and where I went.

So, basically, my day of travel was very limited, generally only about one or two stops. Then I came up to Technology 101, and having gone to a rehab center and found some money on my own to buy a lift-equipped van with a four-point tie-down system, which made this my second-generation for transportation.

My current transportation consisted of two parts, and I think it is very important that these are very integral parts of assistive technology systems.

One of them is getting technical advice from a tech system in Virginia, Virginia Assistive Technology Service. They showed me the benefit of electric lock-down systems, the benefits of different things, and modern technology that I was able to access, touch, feel, and actually try out different things sometimes.

I also have a barrier-free lift, which is a new piece of assistive technology that I saw at one of the VATS conferences that was held years ago. Consequently, what it does is by having great technical assistance, it prevents you from making thousands of dollars in mistakes by purchasing the wrong equipment, even if you can get the money from different services.

My van that I had then, that I could afford on my own without the assistance of an assistive technology loan service, was one that my family and I could afford to buy. It was a much older van, with much higher mileage. We made it last me six years. I do a lot of traveling in my job as director for the Center for Independent Living. And consequently, the van now has 249,000 miles. So you can see, it is very tired.

And many occasions on my trip, I hear from different participants at my center who are people that have CSRs on how technology has helped them. We refer lots of people first to Virginia Assistive Technology Systems so that they can get information and referral, so that they don't make many dollars of mistakes.

And certainly when I was in the rehab center, with the state picking up the tab, I picked up a piece of what I think is useless $800 equipment, which is a page turner. Quite frankly, if you are trying to go from A to Z, sipping and puffing will never get you, a page at a time, from apples to zebra. With my mouth stick, I can do it a whole lot faster. So, you need that guidance that comes from a tech system.

But I should also tell you about my disappointments with the bank systems, and banks that were concerned about participants not having full-time jobs, and I was part-time. I couldn't even consider getting a loan.

Banks didn't understand, necessarily, the piece of equipment people were looking for, they didn't understand it. Using tech systems and assistive technology loan funds in your state, they understand what you are talking about.

Sometimes, if you were requesting a small amount, people wanting $500 to $1,000, you couldn't get that from a bank. It resulted in sub-standard financing alternatives, where people had to get financing from the companies. Many people fall prey to the people that are selling that technology. Everybody knows there is good technology, bad technology, and all kinds of schemes to finance them.

The application process for a loan was very simple. We went to the website, downloaded from the list the application, made the application, sent it off with the standard bank form, mailed the loan to Sun Trust Bank, explaining concerns about different things, and also had the lower interest rate because of a buy-down.

One of the key things that was important about all of it was the fact that it was consumer-controlled. I have a life because of the two systems involved, the consumer direction was allowed.

In conclusion, I would like to be thankful for the ability to access and attain certain modern technologies to make life easier for me, and make sure I have a life. In addition, it makes it easier for those who provide care for me, by having the assistive technology.

Tech products provide direct technical assistance to consumers, service for independent living, and service providers and agencies through their information and referral capabilities. The assistive technology program has made the money available, and made the reality out of the information I received from the tech system.

I thank you for your time, and I apologize for running over a few seconds.

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF WILLIAM WARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INDEPENDENT EMPOWERMENT CENTER, MANASSAS, VIRGINIA - SEE APPENDIX F

Chairman McKeon. I am just glad we didn't have to deal with that trap door. I was very much enjoying your testimony.

Ms. Novak?

STATEMENT OF CAROL NOVAK, PARENT, TAMPA, FLORIDA

Ms. Novak. Thank you very much. I am not so good with the technology, am I?

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing on the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. Research, data, and statistics are useful in assessing the outcome of public policy. But the real experts in assessing outcomes are the people with disabilities who use or need assistive technology.

My son, Jonathan, and I have lived with his cerebral palsy for almost 26 years. During those years, we have acquired extensive knowledge of and experience with assistive technology and federal assistive technology programs.

A variety of assistive technologies enable Jonathan to live a more independent and productive life. He uses the power chair for mobility, an accessible van for transportation, an augmentative communication device for communication, word prediction software for computer access, and a ceiling track lift and transfer system for activities of daily living. He also uses several low-tech assistive technologies, such as a plate guard that enables him to eat independently.

It is important to note that the combined cost of all these technologies that will last over a number of years is less than the cost of one year in a nursing home. The main intent of the original act passed in 1988 was to provide grants to states for the purpose of increasing awareness of assistive technology.

That goal has been accomplished, and the state AT Act projects contributed to this achievement. Today, there are a number of websites that serve as clearinghouses of information on assistive technology.

Mainstream resources are now disseminating information on AT, as well. Business Week Online has run an assistive technology column on a regular basis for several years. AARP's website features a section on tools and gadgets for independent living. Many vendors, from Sunrise Medical to Maxi-Aids, have websites, and even my hometown newspaper publishes occasional articles on assistive technology.

Professional associations, like RESNA, offer conferences and training on assistive technology. Industry, in order to comply with section 508 of the Rehab Act, is addressing disability access in mainstream electronic, and information technologies.

It is no longer necessary or appropriate for federal programs to fund what amounts to assistive technology product marketing efforts. Industry and entrepreneurs are now engaged in the arena of assistive technology, and the private sector is traditionally more efficient than the public sector in exacting change.

Reports by the National Council on Disability and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research have established that the primary reason people with disabilities don't have the technology they need is lack of funding.

The existence of a widespread need for assistive technology is affirmed in the nation's strategic public health plan, Healthy People 2010, by Goal 6-11, which is to "Reduce the proportion of people with disabilities who report not having the assistive devices and technology needed."

The principal funding sources for assistive technology are Vocational Rehabilitation, VA, Medicaid, and school systems when an IDEA student's IEP calls for AT. However, these programs serve narrowly defined populations, and many people with disabilities who can benefit from assistive technology are not eligible for any of them.

Even when a person is eligible for one of these programs, it is often difficult to get funding approval for the purchase of assistive technology. Challenging battles and long waiting periods are typical. For this reason, I support continued funding to the state protection and advocacy offices to advocate for people's assistive technology needs.

In the 21st century, ''We need to make capital investments in people, rather than maintaining them in lifelong dependence on the government," as Newt Gingrich aptly states in

``The Age of Transitions."

In other words, we should be funding people, not programs.

In order to reduce the major barrier to the acquisition of assistive technology - the lack of funding - the resources available for assistive technology programs should be directed as follows: (1) expanding funding for the alternative financing programs authorized in Title III and supported by President Bush in the New Freedom Initiative; (2) promoting assistive technology recycling efforts; (3) funding expert assessments; and (4) providing consumer training for the more sophisticated devices.

Federal assistive technology programs must be responsive to the people they are meant to serve, like Jonathan, and they must be responsible to the taxpayer. This is essential to the achievement of good public policy, because consumers' need for assistive technology is the reason these programs exist, and because it's the taxpayers' money that funds these programs.

We can empower people with disabilities by making funding for the purchase of assistive technology directly available to them.

Increasing their independence and participation through assistive technology will be both responsive and responsible. Thank you.

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CAROL NOVAK, PARENT, TAMPA, FLORIDA - SEE APPENDIX G

Chairman McKeon. Thank you very much. I really enjoyed your testimonies.

I was first elected to Congress in 1993, and we had a mandate to balance the budget. And I remember when we won the majority, and we were really, you know, pushing hard to balance the budget, a lot of people would come to my office and they would say, ``We agree with what you are doing, it is really important. We need to get our financial house in order. But don't cut our program." You know, ``It is a good program."

That is one of the problems we have to deal with: What programs should we carry out on a federal level, and what programs should be carried out on a state level?

I have two good friends, Mr. Ward, that did have accidents like yours. They were in the prime of their lives, and doing very well. One of them was a great athlete. He was a carpenter, he fell off of a roof - and is fortunate to be alive - but he is a paraplegic. And he needs to use these services that are provided.

Another friend was on a vacation and fell off a ladder, and is a paraplegic. And I have been able to do some things to help him, we have been able to get some money to put in a therapeutic pool at a university that is going to help, and an article was written in a paper here about pork that we got for our district to put in a swimming pool. You know, I can live with those kinds of things, because I know the people that we have been able to help.

As you have been talking, I have been just really thinking a lot about this, and I believe in market forces, and I think they are great. I went with my wife one night to get a cell phone, and I saw, you know, the technology that was - it is beyond me - but this guy was teaching her all the things about how to use this cell phone.

But there is a huge market for cell phones. And the market forces will take care of that. We don't need to subsidize the sale of cell phones. People can go out and they can get that technology.

But it seems to me that, fortunately, we don't have a huge market of people that need these kinds of devices. So, the market isn't going to go out and open up stores to teach people how to use these kinds of technologies. If we don't do it, you know, ask people to contribute a little bit of their tax money to do these kind of things, the market isn't going to do this. So, the market doesn't work in all situations, it seems to me, as one that supports market resources.

Your testimonies, the visit that I had the other day, are going to help me in furthering, I think, trying to see that we can continue this program.

I think probably all the people here are supportive, but we have 435 members in the House, we have 100 Senators, and we have the Administration. Can you think of other things, anything that you haven't mentioned already, that might help us in talking to our colleagues that are not here today, or have not had the opportunity to see how important these projects are, that could be helpful to us in arguing on your behalf?

Mr. Rasinski. Just like we didn't know what was going to happen with technology 10 or 13 years ago, when this program started, and we don't know who is going to be disabled in the years to come. We could actually look forward to becoming disabled in some way. Every one of us, even the most athletic get-about-town kind of person there is now can look forward to some form of disability in the future.

What we need to do is make sure that they have some place to go, someone to talk with, that knows about everything that there is to know about assistive technology. And I am not just talking about computer access, I am talking about in the home kinds of things: the ramps, the grab bars, the lift, the mobility issues, what kinds of devices go into a vehicle to make it accessible and carry a person with a disability using a wheelchair.

We are talking about employment. What does a building have to have in it to allow a person with a disability to come and go? The types of software that will be developed, we don't know what kinds of things will be developed in the future.

But if we, right now, strike down the infrastructure that is set in place and becoming day in and day out innovators, moving projects and programs into place as the questions and needs occur, if we lose that infrastructure, we are going to have to start all over again.

The few dollars that it takes, compared to some of the other programs that are run in this country, can easily be set aside for the Tech Act projects. We are talking $34 million, $35 million a year. You guys know that is almost nothing.

When it comes to the effect and the snowball effect that we have within our states, we deal with other organizations, we network, we ask for funding in other ways to create new programs, the monies that we get - Maryland gets $380,000 a year – we will get a few more dollars from the state this year, because Maryland is in a sort of budget crunch itself.

But those dollars are enhanced by what we do with other private organizations and their funding, we do what the educational systems will allow with their funding. It's a tie-in. We do a lot of coordination of the needs for persons with disabilities.

There isn't another program - there is the Rehabilitation Act that deals with persons of adult age who want to be employed. We have IDEA, zeroing in on students of school age.

But the Tech Act programs take people from the moment they are born, if they have a disability, to the moment they die, when they become senior citizens, and they realize the kinds of input that we can have. No other programs or laws cover all those people.

We go into all different areas, the home - we even give people a chance to go out and recreate. We find devices and services that will take them up into the woods, like everyone else, get that free hotdog off the fire, like everyone else loves.

We take folks to work, we find out what kinds of technology there are that will help them make life a little easier.

I know when I was recovering from my initial injury, the first thing I wanted to do is learn how to eat again on my own. I watched food get cold on my plate so many days in a row, I said, ``Help me." They came up with all kinds of devices that helped move my arms, and I started eating again. You can see it helped.

But the idea is that, you know, we don't know what is coming up. And if we strike down an infrastructure that is set in place right now for the sake of a few dollars, then, you know, we are really doing a disservice to the persons of this country, I think. Thank you.

Chairman McKeon. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ward. I will use my assistant to raise my hand, if that is okay.

One of the things I wanted to say - the main thing I said earlier - is that you don't have a life. And as Director for the Center for Independent Living, I see that an awful lot of people come into my office who worry about how they are going to go from day to day, and we work on budgeting issues, and those kinds of things.

But certainly, without assistive technology, number one, I wouldn't have a job; I wouldn't be able to work a full-time job like I do now, as Director for the Center for Independent Living.

Like I said, unlike Mr. Rasinski, I don't feed myself, but I am not losing any weight, either. So I am concerned about that.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Ward. But as far as the Technical Act and technical assistance stuff, certainly I have friends that had their accidents prior to 1982, when I had mine. One gentleman had his in 1964. Back then, without technology, he was sent home to die, period.

He said he was just sent home, they told his mother there was nothing they could do for him. He was one of the persons providing care - he just had the will, and his parents and family had the will to make sure that he lived. And so whatever they could do without technology, they managed, and he survived.

He was so glad to have the technology when I got there, he said, ``Bill, it makes it a whole lot easier for me to work with a big lug like you."

So, consequently, we need to keep technology alive. Certainly, I think we don't know how, some people don't know, how young technology really is, and how the assistive devices have really come into being, greatly, since 1985, because a lot of the information I used, like the first mouth stick I used, required you to have to go to a dentist to get a plate made, for example.

It cost you $150 a pop to go see the dentist to do that. Then when you dropped and broke it, the cast plate had to be redone again, a whole new $150 process. Now, it is a commercially made product, because there is a need for it, and a benefit from having this type of technology. The problem is, the industry will not do it on its own, and certainly it needs to have those encouraging words.

Like I said earlier, though, we need to make sure that we have systems in place, like tech systems, that make sure that we do not buy the wrong kind of technology, and that people don't make all kinds of things because, unfortunately, people with disabilities will become prey to the public and to the vendors that make these products, if there isn't some kind of a government oversight through tech systems and through the assistive technology loan funds that say, ``Wait a minute, you have got to make a decent product for people with disabilities, or we are not going to finance it. It doesn't get financed, if it doesn't get encouraged by the tech systems."

Unfortunately, people with disabilities are looking out for some answer and some product that is going to help them. And they are not going to be able to get the insight if we don't have the financing from other sources to assure that it gets technical oversight, that lemon laws are passed, and different things, to make sure that quality products are put out for people with disabilities, because sometimes people with disabilities are at their most dire straits, and need the assistance and the oversight from the body that comes down through the Tech Act. Thank you.

Chairman McKeon. Thank you very much. My time is well up. Yes? Mrs. Mink says it is okay.

Ms. Novak. Like I said, Jonathan and I have had about 26 years of experience living with a significant disability, and we spent 20 years in Georgia and we love Georgia. But our experience was that the systems, whether it was the Tech Act project, VR, the school system, whatever, were not a source of information for us. They never wanted us to know what was available or what Jonathan's opportunities were.

We found out, because we are resourceful, from other parents, most of the time, occasionally from the P&A, which was always a good and supportive resource.

That is why, you know, in my opinion, based on our life experience, people with disabilities are going to - we are resourceful people. To survive, we have to be resourceful. We are going to find out what is out there.

And whether you own a computer or not, everybody has access to the Internet. It is very rare that people don't have access to the Internet. And you can put in ``assistive technology," or you know, ``talking computer," and you can just get all sorts of information.

And what people need is not just to be told, ``This is what you could have, if you had some money," they need to have funding sources, whether it is loans, grants, whatever, because the other agencies, like Voc Rehab, and Medicaid, and things like them, are not willing payers for assistive technology. You really have to be assertive.

And one of the things that I would also like to suggest - and this goes, actually, way beyond the scope of this committee - is that programs need a big-picture view. For example, Medicaid in Georgia won't spend more than about $5,500 on a power chair.

So, if you happen to have quadriplegia, like these gentlemen, then you are at high risk for pressure sores, which can cost about $75,000 in a long hospital stay to treat. They won't spend $20,000 on a tilting wheelchair, so that you can shift your weight and not end up with these pressures sores.

You know, they are actually costing Medicaid an unnecessary $50,000 - you know, or more than that, if you have repeated pressure sores - plus human suffering, because they don't have a big picture. The DME budget is separate from the acute care budget, and we need some kind of overview, so that we can see that, even though $20,000 sounds like a lot of money for a wheelchair, how can it be a cost saver in the overall picture.

You know, I really feel like in just about every disability program, assistive technology has huge cost-saving potential, but I don't think that it is in the overview of the program.

Chairman McKeon. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Mink?

Mrs. Mink. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly have benefited from all of your testimony. And I think that what we need to relate to is the President's recommendation, which staff tells me is to continue Title III only, the financing part of this program, to allow the disabled community to have access to loans, to finance high-tech assistive technology purchases.

Now, my question to Mr. Schultz and others is if the other two titles are eliminated, and the state programs are not funded, what impact would it have on an individual first entering into this arena of the disabled, to find the kind of technology that they need that is available, and to make a wise choice?

I ask this question very sincerely, because I am one that cannot even buy a toaster without having to look it up to see what is the best buy and what is it capable or not capable of doing.

So when it comes to these extremely sophisticated technology, it seems to me to wipe out the very people who have the expertise is going to make it extremely difficult for a new disabled person to know what is there, how much it costs, what is going to be of particular benefit for the individual person.

So I would like to have Mr. Schultz and others comment on that, because that is a very troubling vacuum, as I see it.

Mr. Schultz. I would be glad to do that. I think the emphasis on Title III is a necessary emphasis, in that it has an important role to play in providing funding for people with disabilities to acquire assisted technology. But I think a reliance on that as the only solution is a real problem.

For one, the Title I programs are the infrastructure, and in a lot of times, administer the Title III programs. So, if you take away that funding, it makes the Title III programs pretty ineffective.

In addition to that, in Nebraska, we did a financial capacity study when we first started out, about 10 years ago, looking at the ability of families and individuals with disabilities to afford assisted technology. And in that study, we were able to determine that about 14 percent of Nebraskans with disabilities would be able to qualify, and would be able to pay a loan back.

So what we did was focus on the 86 percent of individuals who were going through other programs to receive assistance for funding, and to try to get an expansion of those programs to deal with their needs.

In the programs that we have established, we are seeing a similar trend, in that we operate a program that provides funding for independent living services, and that program has provided assistance to about 300 individuals over the last few years. And there is a financial participation requirement there for individuals who have a certain income and so many assets.

In the last three years, only six people have been required to have a financial participation. And those will probably be the six people that might have been eligible for a Title III loan, if we had had a program like that in Nebraska.

In addition, we do work with the Home Of Your Own Coalition, which is a home ownership program. And in that program, we had about 225 requests for assistance over the last several years. We have been able to help 25 of those individuals actually obtain a loan and close on a home.

So, it is a small percentage, when you can see that the majority of people would not be able to benefit, in our case, in Nebraska, from a financial loan program like that. So, Title I programs really need to be around so they can continue to focus on the other 86 to 90 percent of those people who aren't going to be able to obtain equipment through that system.

Now, to address your second issue, in regard to appropriateness of equipment, and the assessments, and helping individuals determine and make informed decisions about what equipment is going to work best for them in their particular situation, we have been doing that with a number of programs in our state.

And one of those is a Medicaid waiver program, where we were able to get the policy changed to include assistive technology and home modifications as a service under that waiver. But then they came to us and said, ``We have no way to know what equipment to fund." Families have no way to know what equipment is appropriate.

So they asked us to set up an assessment. So they asked us to set up an assessment service to get involved in that direct service, helping families get that equipment, and actually pay for it through the Medicaid waiver program. And to the degree that we actually go out there and we help train, we help monitor the installation of the equipment or home modification, and we inspect and make sure it's done correctly. We find that we are experiencing significant cost savings by doing that.

When families first started coming to us and through the program, they would come to a service coordinator and say, ``I have a need for this kind of equipment, or this kind of modification," and they were told to come back with a couple of quotes. There was very little information about whether or not that was the appropriate technology. But if they had two quotes, they could get a check for that equipment.

Now, with the assessment process, we make sure it is the appropriate equipment. And we have been able to reduce the cost significantly, in terms of what is going on.

The other aspect of that process is that we are able to then follow up with those individuals, to see what is happening with the equipment. By making sure the equipment is appropriate - when you look at national statistics, we are looking at an abandonment rate of somewhere between 30 and 40 percent when we look at those traditional systems - equipment not being used. It is going in closets, or being thrown away.

With the process that we have set up, the abandonment rate is percent. And most of that is because individuals are moving, leaving their homes for one reason or another, or dying. So we are able to follow up and get some of that equipment back, put it into a recycling program, and in effect, reduce the cost of services for that program.

We are in our third year with the Medicaid waiver program, and we have actually been able to show now, for the first time, that the cost, the average cost of assistive technology for an individual going through that program is actually reduced from what it was the previous year, because we starting to recycle equipment. If we do not have the Tech Act Title I program, we are going to lose the ability to do that.

Mrs. Mink. Thank you very much. He consumed my five minutes. But I will be back for a second round, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McKeon. Mr. Isakson?

Mr. Isakson. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have learned a lot from all the testimony. Carol, in your testimony, you cut a part out of it because you were obeying the five-minute rule. I really wanted you to elaborate on the Friends of Adults and Children with Disabilities, a non-profit in Atlanta, and your testimony about recycling, which I thought was very helpful, and I would like for the other members to know about.

Ms. Novak. Okay. I think, first of all, that recycling has huge potential for getting assistive technology to more people. Also, it has huge potential for making funds go further.

In Georgia - and actually, in Atlanta - there is a fabulous faith-based non-profit set up. They have never had a nickel of government money. They do struggle constantly for operating capital, but the man that founded this was a 20-year veteran of the Marine Corps, and I guess he, you know, is always faithful.

But anyway, this program takes donations, and as Jonathan grew, and outgrew pediatric wheelchairs, we donated them there. Medicaid basically owned Jonathan's wheelchair, but they had no packing system, they didn't want it back when he outgrew it. So, rather than discard what he had outgrown but hadn't worn out, we gave it to FODAC, Friends of Disabled Adults and Children.

They accept manual chairs, power chairs, hospital beds, walkers, augmentative communication devices, and computers. And with volunteers and donations, they refurbish them. They look as good as new. I would never be ashamed to use a wheelchair, once they have gotten through with it. And we have met people that have wheelchairs that they got through FODAC, because their insurance didn't pay for it.

But this program, actually, when Zel Miller was governor, he went to them and asked them to work with Medicaid on setting up a recycling program for the durable medical equipment Medicaid purchased.

Unfortunately, I think, you know, special interests got the best of that intent, and I think probably the new product vendors killed it. It never went through. And it is unfortunate, because a lot of people who needed assistive technology couldn't get it.

Medicare, too, owns the wheelchairs. VA owns what they buy. But they have no way - so does Vocational Rehabilitation. They have no way of getting back the computers, or any of the other stuff.

So all of this stuff, like you said, really does go to waste. And if we had better coordinated recycling efforts in the states, I think there is an awful lot of technology that, with just a little bit of brushing up or fine-tuning, would be perfectly usable for somebody else.

This also happens with things that are purchased through the school system, because it belongs to the school system, not the student. They bought a laptop with word prediction software for Jonathan to use in high school. When he graduated, he left without that, because it belonged to Cobb County Public Schools, and not Jonathan Hughes.

We were able to get a replacement for the software to use on our PC at home, but a lot of that, then, gets warehoused, because there isn't another student with that particular need. And by the time another student comes along with that need, it is either outdated or forgotten.

So, we are not being, I think, real conscientious about using technology in the most cost-effective way, and I think recycling is a real powerful way to make our dollars go further, and make sure more people get what they need in technology.

Mr. Isakson. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have actually seen this operation. And as we deal with this, if we can find a way to address her recommendation and be a catalyst - because it is unfortunate when Medicaid funds a perfectly good piece of durable equipment, and then when a child outgrows it, or an adult moves to another piece, there is not a mechanism for it to be reclaimed.

And recycling is really not the term, because it portends something that is going to be -.

Mr. Novak. Right. It is not garbage.

Mr. Isakson. Instead, you are talking about hard equipment that could be of tremendous value to another person, and the economics of that are tremendous. So, I hope we will look at that. I appreciate the time and yield back.

Chairman McKeon. Thank you.

Mr. Hinojosa?

Mr. Hinojosa. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to say that I, too, want to compliment the panelists for having done such an excellent job in empowering us with information so that we can do a better job in advocating for your programs.

I have a young nephew, 30-something, who for the last 20 years has been a quadriplegic. And I certainly am very well informed, but there was additional information that was presented today by you that augments my databank of information, and I appreciate that.

I want to thank Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Patsy Mink for their leadership in making this hearing possible, and I am pleased to join all my colleagues present today.

I am here to show my appreciation. I am here to tell you that you can count on my help, and that I will continue to advocate so that these programs can continue. I know that they are very helpful for Americans with disabilities, Americans who need universal design of information technology to be able to help themselves and to be able to continue their life.

I have one question, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to ask that of Mr. Ward. As I understand it, the act requires the Secretary of Education to produce an annual report to Congress on the activities of this act. That is based on section 30.13. To your knowledge, has any report ever been produced?

Mr. Ward. I wouldn't know the answer to that, because I am here as a consumer representative, so I didn't do any background research on the Assistive Technology Act. In my duties as Director for the Independence Center, I wouldn't know that, but I would think that certainly the Department of Rehabilitative Services would.

I think the person that heads our Virginia Assistive Technology system is in the room today. If you would like to ask that question to him, I am sure that would be okay.

Mr. Hinojosa. Can anyone else in the panel tell me if a report has ever been written here in the last, say, three or five years?

Mr. Rasinski. Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Hinojosa. Not to your knowledge. Mr. Schultz?

Mr. Schultz. Not to my knowledge, as well.

Mr. Hinojosa. I thank you. Mr. Chairman, I am a co-convener of a conference that is ongoing now at the U.S. Library of Congress, and I am going to ask that I be excused to be able to continue in that conference that I have been participating since 8:00 this morning. I wanted to come and be here because I think that this is a very important issue.

I, like Johnny Isakson from Georgia, also served on the Texas State board of education - he, in Georgia - and was chairman of the special populations committee. And so, for eight years, I championed this effort. And I am pleased to be here in congress to continue that.

So I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McKeon. Thank you, Mr. Hinojosa, and thank you for that question. We will check with the department, and see if we can get them to comply with that.

Mr. Tierney?

Mr. Tierney. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for convening this hearing today, and Mrs. Mink, for your leadership on this issue, and all of the witnesses who have testified.

This is, obviously, as Mr. Hinojosa says, a significant and important program and aspect, and I think the chairman was right when he said the people that are at this hearing are cognizant of that, and want to be helpful.

I think one selling point is the chairman's question asked, ``How do we get 535 other members moving on this," to just acknowledge, I think, that every one of them has either a friend or a family member, or at least an acquaintance, who has a situation like this. I think all of us have personal situations somewhere within that realm, and I am sure probably everyone in the room probably does.

Just pointing for a second to the question Mr. Isakson raised about reclaiming some of the technology and reusing it. It would seem to me with the websites available, and the Internet available, that some existing agency might have the responsibility, Mr. Chairman, to just have an inventory, a well-defined inventory of what's available, that would be accessible. That would go a long way to dealing with the fact that it gets warehoused and forgotten, as Ms. Novak said.

And I would hope that, perhaps, with the context of reauthorizing this, or extending this legislation, we might put one small aspect in there, or an appropriate place that would just allow for that to happen is one suggestion.

It also seems to me - and maybe the witnesses here can help - that there are two times, at least, in people's lives when they have a disability, it becomes very difficult in transitional stages, when they are going from the adolescence to the adult situation, which we have a tremendous amount of problems in our district in terms of employment and living in a self-sustaining manner, and the other when people who are probably reaching the age of 50, 55, 60 and their parents are 78, 79, 80, 82, and no longer able to assist that individual, or pass away.

How does assistive technology help us keep those people independent and self-sufficient so that they don't necessarily have to go into a nursing home, or be put into an environment where it really isn't appropriate for them, in a place we wouldn't want to relegate them to?

And anybody who feels -.

Mr. Rasinski. I would like to -.

Mr. Tierney. Mr. Rasinski, if you would like to start? Sure.

Mr. Rasinski. You just stated my life. Since my accident in 1977 - I was 24 years old. My parents were in their fifties. They have taken care of me up until this point. My dad passed away about 10 years ago, my mom, at 82, has just become disabled to the degree that she can no longer take care of me.

But my brothers have stepped in and taken care of me to this point. I have the opportunity, with my position, and my income, to move into my own home now. For the last two years I have been remodeling it, making it totally accessible.

But there are a lot of folks who do not have that opportunity. And there aren't that many programs available. The Olmstead Act is trying to lead government and states into taking care of that problem, by making monies available, through the waivers, to keep people in their homes by either remodeling their homes, making them accessible to the persons with disabilities, or bringing in personal assistant care to help the aging caretakers, or the caretakers who just need a break from the day-in and day-out.

Taking care of a person with a disability is a 24-hour-a-day job. No matter what they can do for themselves, there is something they can't do. And those are the kinds of things that the Tech Act projects are trying to work on through health care, technology, everything that we can do, we are piecing together the different parts that would make it a little easier for everyone involved.

Mr. Tierney. Mr. Ward, did you want to respond?

Mr. Ward. Yes. Certainly, technology comes with a price, of course, and certainly more modern technology is making life easier, too. They make it so people that have fewer abilities to help people with disabilities can still contribute. Like my father couldn't do the tie-downs with the old tie-down system, but with the electric lock-downs, he could do much better.

I went with two personal assistants to get me in and out of bed to do manual transfers to a stair glide, to where I have a lift - the new technology, at a higher cost, of course - in the ceiling that is on a track, that actually provides a sling that lifts me up, transports me across the room, drops me in the bed, transports me around my house, drops me in the bathtub, you know, available to transport me around, drop me in a chair, whatever.

It makes it a lot easier so that one person, whether it is my daughter, or whether it is my wife, or whether it is just one senior person - it can make it so that people that are helping you - they can aid you and help you a little bit longer, too.

Of course, better technology, and certainly some of the monies in Virginia have been donated and designated towards - by the Statewide Independent Living Council - on getting people out of nursing homes. And certainly, some of that is involved in getting people better technology, better training. And certainly with the technology, you need to have all those components kind of together.

And certainly, like I said before, I see a lot of technology as a two-component system, and maybe there are ways to have some of the tech systems do some of this refurbishing and reallocating of purchase sources.

Certainly, I know at our Center for Independent Living, we take in assistive technology from people and try to, I guess, reallocate it to other folks. And certainly people, when they die and pass on, they have - we have had two-month-old wheelchairs, for example, that people didn't know what they were going to do with.

. So they said, ``Can you use that at your center?" So, certainly, we took it as a donation and I have to go around to warehouse the stuff until I can loan it out.

So these loan programs, and recycling, rehabbing, and the reallocating of materials that are purchased in assistive technology certainly need some kind of a clearinghouse. The only ones I know of are done by individuals, or done by organizations that are put together through Lions, or something like that.

But certainly, there is a lot of food for thought, I think, in that arena. And also, like I said, the idea to help people with technology, and to deal with this living barrier, too.

Mr. Tierney. Thank you very much. Thank all of you, very much, for your testimony.

Chairman McKeon. Thank you. Well, this has been very enlightening. James told me he just called over to the Department, and many of the members are over on the Senate side today, because they are having their first IDEA hearing over there.

So he wasn't able to get an answer. But to our knowledge, there has been no report filed, and we will follow up and see that we can get some attention on that.

I want to thank the witnesses, and the members that were here today. And I would encourage you to stay in touch with us. We will need your help and support as we advocate for you, and as we move into the reauthorization process next year, we will be calling on you again for further help, because we will want to make any improvements we can. That is the purpose of the reauthorization.

If there is no further business, then, this subcommittee stands adjourned. Thank you.

WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY GUS ESTRELLA, SENIOR POLICY ADVOCATE, UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY ASSOCIATIONS, WASHINGTON, D.C. – SEE APPENDIX H

WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY RALPH W. MOHNEY, JR., SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, RETURN-TO-WORK SERVICES, UNUMPROVIDENT CORPORATION – SEE APPENDIX I

WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY ROBERT A. STODDEN, PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTERS ON DISABILITIES, AND

DIRECTOR, CENTER ON DISABILITY STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII, MANOA – SEE APPENDIX J

WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION, BETHESDA, MARYLAND – SEE APPENDIX K

WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY NANCY CREAGHEAD, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND – SEE APPENDIX L

WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY STEVEN I. JACOBS, PRESIDENT, IDEAL (INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES: ENABLING ADVOCACY LINK) AT THE NCR CORPORATION – SEE APPENDIX M

LETTER SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY DAVID SCHERER, OUTREACH COORDINATOR, DAKOTALINK, RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA – SEE APPENDIX N

WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY DIANE GOLDEN, PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF TECH ACT PROJECTS, SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS – SEE APPENDIX O

DOCUMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN FUND AUTHORITY, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA – SEE APPENDIX P

LETTERS FROM CONSTITUENTS TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS REGARDING THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY RANKING MEMBER PATSY T. MINK, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE - THESE DOCUMENTS ARE CONTAINED IN THE OFFICIAL RECORD, WHICH IS ON FILE WITH THE COMMITTEE AND CAN BE VIEWED DURING NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS

[Whereupon, at 11:58 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX A - WRITTEN OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C.

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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE HOWARD "BUCK" McKEON

CHAIRMAN

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS

March 21, 2002 Hearing On:

"ASSESSING THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998"

Good morning. Thank you for joining us for this important hearing today to hear testimony on the achievements of the assistive technology programs funded under the federal Assistive Technology Act of 1998—the AT Act—and on what should be the future federal role in this area.

Today, all fifty states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, have a State Assistive Technology Project funded under title I of the AT Act. These State AT Projects provide a variety of services and programs, such as information and referral services, assessment for appropriate assistive technology, equipment demonstration and buy-out, and refurbished assistive technology equipment. The federal grants to these State AT Projects are administered through the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research at the U.S. Department of Education.

Earlier this week, my staff and I toured the District of Columbia Assistive Technology Resource Center to learn more about how the Center works with the AT Act. It was a very informative visit, and we learned how the Center handles referrals from various government agencies and how the Center works with the child, student, or adult to find out what services and equipment work best for them. We also saw and observed demonstrations of many of the devices that are used by those needing assistive technology.

In addition to the State AT Projects funded under title I of the AT Act, title III provides federal assistance for state alternative financing programs, such as low-interest loan programs offered through the State AT Projects and local or regional banks that assist individuals with disabilities seeking to purchase assistive technology at a cost they can afford. Currently, thirty-two states offer financial loan programs that provide loans at low-interest rates to individuals with disabilities. Sixteen of these loan programs are funded under title III of the AT Act. Assistive technology typically purchased through these programs include vans or vehicle modifications, wheelchairs, adapted computers and other equipment that assists individuals with disabilities in obtaining or maintaining employment or in increasing their mobility or adaptability in a home, school, or community environment.

One important reason for holding this hearing is to gather information that will help this Subcommittee assess whether these federal assistive technology programs, especially the state grant programs funded under title I, have fulfilled their original purpose. When Congress first acted in 1988 to provide technology-related assistance for individuals with disabilities, it created a 10-year state grants program to provide seed money to establish systems within each state for improving access to assistive technology for individuals with disabilities. Many now argue that the state grants programs now operating in every state have fulfilled the Act's mandate to "increase access to, availability of, and funding for assistive technology through state efforts and national initiatives."

More specifically, the 1994 amendments to the 1988 Act included an explicit sunset provision indicating that federal funding would begin to decrease in the final three years of the programs and would completely cease at the end of ten full years of funding. States were to take fiscal responsibility for these programs when federal funding ceased, and have known this now for eight years.

In 1998, Congress extended funding so that states that did not receive initial funding until 1994 could receive their full ten years of funding under the AT Act. States who had been in the program prior to 1994 were given three additional years of funding to continue meeting the federal mandate, allowing them additional time to address the significant changes in electronic technology for people with disabilities that were being developed in the late 1990s.

Under current law, federal funding phases out over the final two years of the program (75 percent and then 50 percent of the original funding level). This was done so as to encourage states to take responsibility for the state systems developed under the AT Act as federal funding was gradually phased out. In fact, Mr. Goodling, the former Chairman of this Committee, felt very strongly that the federal government should only provide seed money for state system development and that this program should not become another never-ending federal program.

This year, twenty-three states are scheduled to be eliminated from federal funding in this upcoming fiscal year. The President's 2003 budget request supports the sunset of these 23 State AT Projects and does not include funding for them. The President, however, has included funding for programs under title III of the AT Act of 1998, which provides funding for the alternative financing programs.

Many argue that ten years is sufficient time for each state to have established a state system for technology access and that states should no longer need funds for system development. At this point, they note the better use of federal funds is to support the revolving loan fund in title III of the AT Act to help individuals with disabilities purchase assistive technology. On the other hand, many believe that the federal government should continue to provide assistance to states, because technology—having it and being able to use it—has become a reality of daily life. This is something we should explore with our witnesses today.

Authorization for the AT Act of 1998 expires in fiscal year 2004, and this hearing is aimed to provide a sense of how states are doing in their efforts to develop State Assistive

Technology Projects that successfully provide a system of services to individuals with disabilities. During this hearing, we will hear from the directors of two of these state projects. In addition, we will hear from a consumer of assistive technology who obtained low-interest loans through a state loan fund authority. Last, we will hear from an assistive technology policy expert, who is also the mother of an adult son who uses assistive technology, about her recommendations for the future of the AT Act of 1998.

The subcommittee welcomes your insights. I am sure the witnesses' testimonies will be invaluable as we continue to examine assistive technology issues.

With that, I would like to recognize Congresswoman Mink for any opening statement she may have.

APPENDIX B - LETTERS REGARDING THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY RANKING MEMBER PATSY T. MINK, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Letters received from:

Hawaii
California
Ohio
Kentucky
Utah
North Carolina
North Dakota
Missouri
New York
Maine
Vermont

Statewide Independent Living Council of Hawaii
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
United Cerebral Palsy of New York City (UCP)
-Also, has received dozens (hundreds?) of letters of support for this act
Bronx Independent Living Services
Center for Independent Living of South Florida
Baltimore County Public Schools Audiology Service
Partnerships in Assistive Technology
Southern Maine Parent Awareness

Assistive Technology
Resource Centers of Hawaii
Linking People with Assistive Technology

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March 19, 2002
ATRC: 200230

Representative Patsy Mink, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
FAX: 202-225-4987

Dear Representative Mink:

As you know the oversight hearing on Assistive Technology Act of 1998 is being held on March 21st by the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. As we have discussed and as you have shown over the years this Act and its intent is extremely important to persons with disabilities. It has been 9 years since Congress has seriously looked at what this act has accomplished. This important legislation provides funds to states to support access to technology for people with disabilities. As the Tech Act Project Director for Hawaii and as a person with a disability, I know firsthand about the importance of this federal support.

The Hawaii Tech Act project began in 1991. Our major areas of focus include linking individuals to assistive technology and empowering them through its use. Over the past 10 and half years, our most important accomplishments include: 1). Extensive outreach and provision of information to consumers, families, service providers and vendors. 2). Extensive training of consumers, family members, service providers and vendors. 3) Annual AT Day at the Legislature for Senators, Representatives, the Executive Branch, the public and the media, 4). State legislation that has reduced barriers to the acquisition of assistive technology. 5). A lower interest loan in partnership with American Savings Bank. 6). Equipment loan banks across the state. In Year 10 alone additional services and supports were added. 7) Implementation of an education program for the new national Speech to Speech (STS) Relay Service, 8) Continued support and development of Newsline for Blind, a comprehensive news relay service for persons unable to access printed newspapers, 9) Continued development of the Technology Resource Center as a central hub for AT training for the state of Hawaii and the Pacific Rim, and 10) Increased electronic access to information through the ATRC webpage including IT resources, vendors, online registration for training workshops, online needs assessment/evaluation forms, and links to other national and international AT services.

If we do not exist, there is no other program that has as its focus assistive technology. We are the "reminder" in our state at all meetings and at the legislature, that assistive technology does make a difference in the lives of persons with disabilities. We are an essential resource for the consumer. Vendors are aware that individuals have knowledge about the products they want and need and therefore vendors can bring those products and services to the marketplace. We provide the financial loan programs that allow many individuals to acquire the technology they want and need, when other resources are not available. Title III of the Assistive Technology Act 1998 is sufficiently funded to provide low interest loans for the purchase of assistive technology. Without continued funding in the next budget, Hawaii's opportunity to take advantage of the loan program under Title III will not be possible.

Last year the Appropriations Bill funding the Department of Education included an important technical amendment that allowed continued funding for all Tech Act state projects in FY 2002. We need a similar amendment in the FY 2003 bill. Without this amendment, a sunset provision in the statute would require a phase out of this funding for 23 states. If this happens, Hawaii's funding will end September 30, 2004. I am convinced that once the funding stops for the first 23 states, the others will follow. We will no longer be a collective voice.

The House oversight hearing on March 21st provides an important opportunity to educate Members about the need for continued federal support for Tech Act projects. Since enactment of this law in 1988, the development of new technologies has literally exploded. The important opportunities that assistive technology offers people with disabilities to live and work independently are extraordinary. Please let Congressman Howard "Buck" McKeon know how ~~most~~ much people with disabilities in Hawaii appreciated his support for last year's amendment and his willingness to conduct this hearing.

Thank you very much for your consideration and your voice in Congress in favor of this important Act.

Me ke aloha pumehana,

Barbara Fischlowitz-Leong
Project Director

Assistive Technology Act of 1998 Program in Hawaii

HAWAII ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM
At

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY RESOURCE CENTERS OF HAWAII (ATRC)

414 Kuwili Street, Suite 104
Honolulu, Hawaii 96817
909.532.7110
www.atrc.org

Year Funded: 1991

What ATRC Does that Others Don't Do

- Provides an interagency, collaborative infrastructure to develop assistive technology policy that is beneficial to Hawaii residents with disabilities and their families.
- Provides interagency, statewide, consumer-focused training on assistive technology to consumers and service providers, with particular focus on underrepresented populations (rural, ethnic minorities, aging).
- Provides the statewide, interagency infrastructure to acquire future state and federal support to assist people with disabilities and their families (see What Hawaii Stands to Lose below) at a time when federal policy requires greater community access and independence for people with disabilities. In addition, Hawaii's population, including those with disabilities and those over the age of 60, is growing at one of the highest rates in the country.

Impact on People

Selected Activities	Impact in 2001
Training and technical assistance regarding assistive technology funding, assessment, evaluation and use of technology to enhance independence.	900 consumers/family members 600 service providers 46 employers
Public awareness and outreach through exhibits and demonstrations.	15,000 individuals
Alternative financing program funded in part by state grant program.	6 loans approved $75,000 total loan amount
Information and referral services specific to assistive technology.	960 individual information requests
Acquisition of assistive technology through independent living program.	120 individuals $200,000 state funds expended

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What Hawaii Stands to Lose

$377,000 in federal funding for the Hawaii Assistive Technology Program that translates into the benefits listed below:

- Infrastructure to operate a statewide, interagency training program on assistive technology. The program generated $100,000 in additional funding. The ability to seek these funds in future years will be lost.
- Infrastructure to operate the statewide assistive technology lower-interest loan program will cease to exist. This fund currently has $400,000 in federal mony and there is an opportunity to increase loan opportunities through Title III funds of the AT Act as well as state and private funds. No support from ATRC will seriously jeopardize the future viability of this program—federal principal can't be used for daily operation expenses; interest generated from this current program (HAT Loan Program) can only be used as a guarantee for assistive devices and services.
- Infrastructure to apply for future grants under Title III of the AT Act of 1998. Hawaii plans to apply in the summer of 2002. The Administration increased funding for Title III by $20 million and, at the same time, is eliminating the infrastructure to apply for and administer these programs.
- Infrastructure to assist individuals with disabilities, their families, and service providers in acquiring appropriate assistive technology devices and services through state funded sources will be gone.
- Infrastructure to provide in-depth assisitive technology training and technical assistance to service providers, public and private agencies/organizations, and individual consumers will no longer exist. During 2000, this effort was conservatively valued at $100,000.
- Infrastructure to operate Equipment Loan Banks throughout the state. There are currently 3 banks on O'ahu and one on each of the Neighbor Islands. Access to technology for assessment, evaluation will be eliminated. Consumer will no longer be able to try out equipment before a purchase is made or to borrow equipment while theirs is being repaired.
- A state of the art technology lab located in downtown Honolulu will be closed. Opportunity to try out the latest technology will be eliminated.

In his New Freedom Initiative President Bush acknowledges the importance of technology for people with disabilities by calling for federal involvement in assistive technology initiatives.

If you have questions regarding this information, please contact Barbara Fischlowitz-Leong at barbara@atrc.org or by phone at 808.532.7112.

March 11, 2002

To: Steven Tingus
Director of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

From: Association of Tech Act Projects (ATAP)

In response to your request regarding continuing unmet needs in the states related to assistive technology, the Association of Tech Act Projects poled its members to collect information. Over half of the states and territories participated in contributing the information that is summarized here. The states and territories that participated are Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northern Marianas, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virgin Islands, Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming.

State Assistive Technology (AT) programs engage in a wide variety of activities designed to increase access to AT in the areas of education, employment, health care, information technology and telecommunications, and community living. Activities undertaken meet needs in these areas include general services such as state system coordination and policy improvement, information dissemination, individual assistance and advocacy, outreach, awareness, and training along with more specific programs such as financial loan programs, equipment loan programs, equipment recycling programs, and equipment exchange programs.

The unmet needs identified could be address through any number and combination of activities. For example some unmet needs might require training and technical assistance be provided; others might require new or creative funding sources; and others might require a combination of activities over time.

Unmet Over Arching AT Needs

> Without any permanence to the AT legislation, there has been an ongoing reluctance at the state level to invest heavily in innovative or expansive initiatives. Valuable resources and energy have been utilized to plan for program demise that could have been used more productively with a firm federal commitment to maintain the state AT program infrastructure.
>
> At both a state and federal level, there is the need for increased cross agency collaboration to support AT access. Just as with the implementation of the Olmstead Decision, the New Freedom Initiative or disability program initiatives, many agencies need to work in sync to assure comprehensive outcomes without duplication of effort. Many times DOL, OSERS, HHS, SSA and other agencies issue RFP's that do not include or even reference state AT programs when the initiative has extensive AT or technology access components. The end result is grantees who lack needed expertise or grantees who duplicate existing expertise and activities.
>
> The current economic situation is creating a volatile environment for all AT funding sources. It is very likely that public funding sources

for AT will begin to revise policies to scale back coverage. For example in many states there is already discussion about eliminating Medicaid "optional" programs that are the primary mechanism for funding AT.

Unmet AT Needs in Education

Increasing emphasis on accountability and standardized testing correspondingly increases the need for understanding and use of AT to support valid student academic achievement. For many students with disabilities AT is the avenue to participate in standardized testing.

Increasing emphasis on early literacy can be supported and enhanced through the use of assistive and adaptive instructional technologies. Early communication using augmentative systems and computer adaptations such as alternative keyboards allow young children with disabilities to develop literacy at a pace in step with others.

Increasing demands on all teachers to have technology skills has created a parallel need for increased assistive technology knowledge for special and regular educators. If all students are to use educational technology effectively, adaptations and assistive technology must be available and used appropriately or students with disabilities will be left behind. There is a critical lack of professionals who are expert in assessing the assistive technology needs of students with disabilities, as required in constructing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Unmet AT Needs in Employment

The Workforce Investment Act, Ticket to Work Act and other recent federal initiatives have created a state environment of change within the employment service system. One-stop employment centers are struggling to effectively service individuals with disabilities and are in need of extensive support and technical assistance to make their computer labs, telephones and other media accessible.

The increasing use of work related tele-commuting holds promise for increasing employment options for individuals with disabilities. Tele-commuting for people with disabilities frequently requires assistive technology in the form of computer and telephone adaptations. However, many employers and people with disabilities need assistance in obtaining the right adaptations and need support to ensure their successful use.

Unmet AT Needs in Health Care

Due to advances in health care increasing numbers of individual are living with permanent functional limitations, that require assistive technology for independence and productivity. Yet the health care system continues to classify most AT as durable medical equipment (DME) and health insurance provides inadequate or no DME benefits.

Unmet AT Needs in Information Technology and Telecommunications

Increasingly, Americans are becoming dependent on "on-line" information and services to accomplish everyday activities: booking travel, shopping, paying bills, checking a bank balance and accessing government services. For many people with disabilities that means having access to a computer AND the adaptation necessary to use the computer. Not only is this a significant cost barrier, it also requires access to support services to be able to select and use the adaptations which are difficult to come by. The movement to E-government at all levels of government increases access demands by people with disabilities.

Information technology and telecommunications products and services have become very complex and correspondingly the assistive technology in these fields has become complex. The greater the complexity, the greater the demand for individuals with expertise and the more scare those people have become. People with expertise in mainstream IT and Telecom are difficult to come by for everyone these days; finding individuals with expertise in IT and Telecom accessibility for people with disabilities is even more challenging.

Public use information technology, particularly computer lab settings in libraries, colleges, and community centers, are typically not accessible for individuals who need computer adaptations. Unlike architectural access, there are no national standards or legal requirements for computer lab accessibility (e.g. at least one stations must have screen enlarging software) and as a result, many individuals are left unable to utilize critical public services independently.

Community Living

With impending passage of election reform legislation, states will be embarking on a major change in the type of voting equipment used. New equipment will need to be accessible for voters with disabilities and Secretaries of State and local election officials will need technical assistance in selecting accessible voting equipment and in training election officials in appropriate usage.

States continue to develop and refine their Olmstead plans to support the move of individuals with disabilities into community living. AT frequently plays a critical role is enabling an individual to live outside of an institutional setting.

Accessible housing continues to be limited or non-existent in many communities. A few states and communities have implemented "visitability" laws mandating specific universal design features be included in residential construction; but most of the country still has no incentive or requirement that will increase the number of accessible residences.

For most AT related to community living, such as home modifications and vehicle modifications, there is no core funding source. This kind of AT is typically not funded by health care, education or employment - e.g. it is not considered medically necessary, educationally necessary, or necessary for employment. Yet without this basic AT, all other areas suffer. Funding is most frequently cobbled together though tenacious efforts to locate and secure community resources.

The aging of the American population is also increasing demand for AT for seniors. This population is typically unaware of AT options and requires extensive support in selecting and using AT because of limited prior experience with such devices. Access to AT can often be the reason why elderly people are able to stay in their homes rather than have to move to costly nursing homes.

State Assistive Technology Grant Programs and the New Freedom Initiative

The New Freedom Initiative (NFI) is designed to, "ensure that all Americans with disabilities have the tools to use their skills, and make more of their own choices." Below is a list of New Freedom Initiative key components and titles, and a listing of activities undertaken by state assistive technology grant programs that currently are, or could easily become, specific state activities if continued funding for state assistive technology grant programs is provided.

NFI Key Components/ Titles	State AT Grant Program Activities
Title I: Increasing Access to Assistive and Universally Designed Technologies	Expand consumer demand for new technology through awareness, outreach, advocacy and training activities. * Establish, maintain, expand, and operate low-interest cash loan programs. * Identify and communicate consumer needs/ market demands to researchers and manufacturers. #
Title II: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Americans with Disabilities	Provide in-service and pre-service training to deliver reading instruction via assistive technology (e.g., computer access devices and software). This may include content areas other than reading (e.g., math, social studies, science, literature, etc.). *
Title IV: Integrating Americans with Disabilities into the Workforce	Provide technical assistance, training and awareness to employers regarding selection of appropriate assistive technology devices and services to accommodate employees. * Training and technical assistance to employers and prospective employers regarding telework options, including selection and set up of assistive technology devices. # Operate and promote the loan program for telecommuting equipment. # Training and technical assistance to assist people who need AT for employment, including training to rehabilitation providers and vendors who "take" tickets. *
Title VI: Promoting Full Access to Community Life	Training and technical assistance to consumers, including those in rural and underrepresented populations, and service providers regarding assistive and universally designed technology to enhance integration into the community. * Develop innovative assistive technology initiatives to support full implementation of the *Olmstead* decision and its full intent for community-based opportunities. * Training and technical assistance to ensure access to the election/voting process by ensuring full access to polling places and to accessible voting technology. * Training and technical assistance to assist states in making eGovernment accessible (translating Section 508 standards into practice at the state level). * Training and technical assistance to health care practitioners; develop accessible telehealth approaches. # Technical assistance and information for ADA-exempt organizations to expand and ensure access for all. #

* Current activities in most state programs.

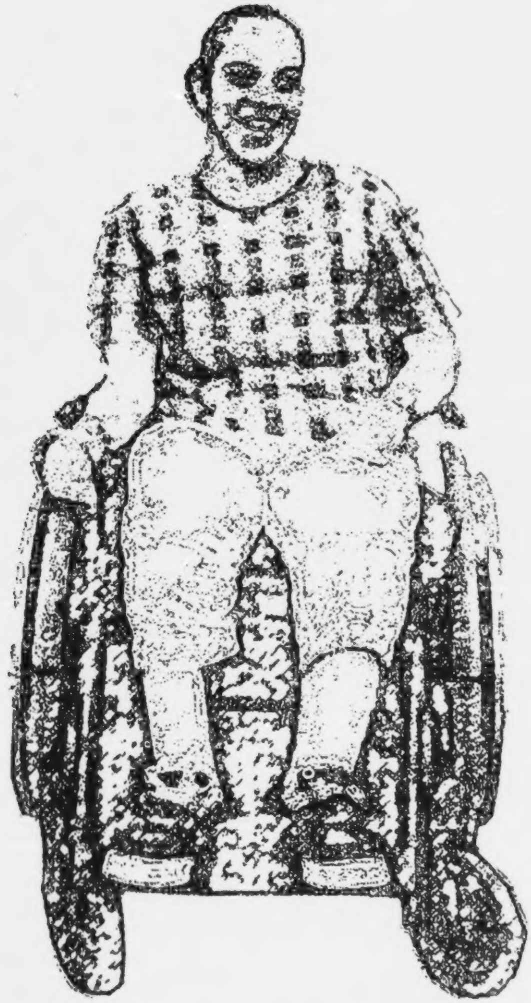
# Several state programs have demonstrated expertise in this area.

This document was prepared for the Association of Tech Act Projects (ATAP). ATAP can be contacted through Ellin Nolan 202-289-3900 or Jane West 301-718-0979. ATAP, 1 W. Old State Capitol Plaza, Suite 100, Springfield, IL 62701.
Website: www.ataporg.org February 2002

Assistive Technology Resource Centers of Hawaii

YEAR 2000 STATUS REPORT

ATRC of Hawaii
414 Kuwili Street, Suite 104
Honolulu, Hawaii 96817
Voice/TDD (808) 532-7110 Toll-Free (800) 645-3007
Fax (808) 532-7120 e-mail: atrc@atrc.org



Cheryl Ellis, 17 Years Old

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[illegible] Kalani [illegible] wheelchair bound man, he believed the government officials who promised he would have a [illegible] communication device by [illegible]. But state government failed to deliver and Kalani [illegible] lost hope and weight.

Kalani has developmental and physical disabilities and is unable to speak. He can only respond to questions by raising his eyebrows or indicating "yes" or "no" through eye movements. Everyone who knows him knows that despite his handicaps, he is intelligent, outgoing and personable. Even though he is unable to speak physically, Kalani has been [illegible] what is known as an augmentative communication device (such as a voice synthesizer). Because of his physical condition, Kalani can use his head to "hit" programmed keys to generate synthesized or digitized speech. But despite promises by government officials, Kalani—who was a ward of the State—did not have such a device until the summer of 199[illegible].

Kalani got a "light talker" in 19[illegible], but in 19[illegible] the device malfunctioned four times in six months resulting in down time and repairs. In March 1985, Kalani's light talker malfunctioned again and was under repair for two and a half months. Finally, health officials recommended "an investigating process of acquiring a new device." The health department resisted efforts to obtain a new communications device, and Medicaid refused to pay for an augmentative communications device because it was "not medically necessary." State Rep. Cynthia Thielen (Kailua and Kaneohe Bay) interceded repeatedly on Kalani's behalf after months of bureaucratic delays.[1]

Rep. Thielen and Assistive Technology Resource Centers of Hawaii (ATRC) brought Kalani to the State capitol where, with the help of an augmentative communication device, he was able to talk about what had occurred. With ATRC as a facilitator, Kalani finally obtained a new augmentative communication device and is continuing to receive training to use it. Without the help of Rep. Thielen and ATRC, Kalani might still be communicating with only his eyebrows and eye movement.

Assistive Technology Resource Centers of Hawaii, or ATRC, is a non-profit agency dedicated to helping all people with disabilities in Hawaii participate in every aspect of community life including education and employment. We are committed to ensuring that those who can utilize it have access to the most appropriate assistive technology available. Our mission is twofold:

- To link individuals with technology so all people can participate in every aspect of community life, and
- To empower individuals to maintain dignity and control in lives by promoting technology through advocacy, training, information

In pursuing our goals, the ATRC team has developed a set of core values that permeate agency operations:

- We believe that all people with disabilities have a right to assistive technology.
- We respect the individual's ability to make choices about his/her life.
- We are sensitive to the rich cultural diversity in Hawaii.
- We maintain open minds to find creative solutions to specific situations.
- We know that *everyone* has something to contribute to his or her community.
- We work together as staff and volunteers with consumers to create opportunities.
- We collaborate as equal partners with consumers, service providers, and the community.
- We educate others and ourselves as the first step towards universal acceptance of assistive technology.

Technology devices and services can help people with disabilities to live richer, less confined lives and enable them to do what *they* want to do—not merely what *others* think they can do. ATRC provides clients with

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[1] Adapted from a personal account written by Rep. Cynthia Thielen, "Government refuses to let man communicate," published in the Honolulu Advertiser, 1/31/99, page B3 .

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information and training on these devices and services. We do NOT sell or endorse any products, so we have no vested interests and can thus serve as an impartial advocate on behalf of consumers, helping them find the best solution to meet their particular needs. We also help people to locate funding resources, since cost can often be a determining factor in whether or not someone is able to utilize available technology.

At ATRC, we accomplish our mission in a variety of ways by

- Assisting individuals who may contact us by telephone, TDD/TTY, in person or over the Internet;
- Collaborating with a multiplicity of service providers such as vendors and groups including consumers, educators, employers, State agencies, and private organizations;
- Providing training and information on assistive devices, our services, and funding sources;
- Working to increase awareness of assistive technology;
- Promoting self-advocacy for persons with disabilities; and
- Acting to bring about changes in practices, policies and laws to improve access to assistive technology devices and services.

We provide services across our island community. ATRC staff travel from our offices in Honolulu to neighbor islands an average of four or five times a month to work with other agencies. We introduce them to new technology that is becoming available and work with individuals to help resolve specific situations. This outreach effort is integral to our mission, as individuals cannot be linked to assistive technology if they don't know what is available. ATRC staff and volunteers conduct approximately forty outreach presentations annually, ranging from exhibits at community health fairs to speaking to disability support groups or in-service training sessions for health and rehabilitation professionals.

Our "Dare to Dream" problem-solving tool is a technique of finding consumer-directed AT solutions consistent with the family and community values of Hawaii's independent living and AT movement. The program was developed with feedback and support from specialists across our state who hosted more than fifty visits to the homes of persons with severe disabilities. This direct consumer input validated the culturally sensitive approach and values of consumer empowerment, rural outreach, and cross cultural communication that ensures that persons with disabilities have access to assistive technology. Successful outcomes include a university student who experienced a catastrophic stroke and now uses a head-controlled computer system for Internet web page design and communications and a blind man with a severe speech impediment who is now able to record his own stories and poems using "talking" software.

In addition to assisting people who contact us on an individual basis, ATRC staff uses a group format to teach people how to advocate for themselves using today's technology rather than depending on others. Surfing the Internet can allow someone to discover a wealth of information that they can use to reach their particular goals.

Our overall approach to working with people with disabilities has been validated by the Family Resource Center on Technology and Disability, a program of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. They have designated ATRC as an exemplary program that addresses the technology needs of children/youth and their families. The Center commended ATRC on its success in providing access to programs and services for consumers from various ethnic, language, and cultural backgrounds and our proven ability to reach rural and underserved communities. Extensive consumer involvement in all aspects of ATRC's needs assessment, program development and evaluation, our use of a variety of assistive technologies, and ongoing collaboration with diverse organizations were key elements noted by the Family Resource Center in making the award.

What Is Assistive Technology and Who Uses It?

Imagine knowing that a wide range of life opportunities exists, if only you could open the door and access them on the other side of the wall. Assistive technology, or AT, can be described as the key that unlocks and opens that door for those people who just happen to have a disability. Occupational therapist Mary Ellen Buning refers to AT as "devices that can be used by persons with sensory, motor, and cognitive limitations to achieve greater independence and self-reliance."[2] According to The Technology-Related Assistance Act for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (the "Tech Act"), an AT device is *"any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities."*

AT, in its most basic definition, can range from the very simplest of everyday items that we all take for granted but don't think of as "technology"--such as eyeglasses or hearing aids—to computerized voice synthesizers. For a person with a disability, a modified eating utensil or a piece of clothing on which the fasteners have been altered to make dressing easier can make all the difference in the quality of their daily lives. An older person who has trouble walking or someone with balance problems may find it easier and safer to use a chair that can lift them from a sitting to a standing position.

Everyone wants to live life to the fullest of his or her potential. AT can help a person with disabilities to do that, but only if there is a good match between the technology and the individual. If a person doesn't like a particular device for some reason—be it ease of use, appearance, or whatever—they may not use it. As an example, a person with a vision disability who is not completely blind may need a wristwatch. The individual is not pleased with the one style of talking or large numeral watch offered by The Lighthouse or Maxi-Aids at a modest price. If this person has the economic resources and is aware of its existence, they may very well decide to purchase a designer watch with a very large face and numerals for several hundred dollars. The latter meets their need and they will in fact use and enjoy the watch, whereas they might simply refuse to wear one if the only choice was between a conventional timepiece and the one offered by The Lighthouse or Maxi-Aids. A person with a modest hearing impairment who might have benefited from hearing aids might have refused to wear them until the relatively recent advent of today's "invisible" hearing aids that fit completely into the ear canal. Someone who cannot walk needs a mobility device and may refuse to use a wheelchair but happily gets about on a motorized scooter. ATRC specialists assess individual needs and situations to provide as much relevant information as possible, thus giving the person a choice from the full range of appropriate options.

[illegible]

It is important to remember that with the increasingly aging population in our state, it is estimated that seven out of ten persons will acquire a disability in their lifetime.

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[2] Buning, Mary Ellen, (January 15, 1999), "What Is Assistive Technology?" retrieved September 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://www.pitt.edu/~mbuning/whatisat.html

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Why Is Assistive Technology Important?

In today's technology oriented world, there is no reason that people with disabilities cannot and should not participate fully. Access to computers can open up a whole world for someone with a disability, whether it be a communicative barrier or a sensory or motor skill disability. Think of what the TTY has meant to people who cannot use a regular telephone, either because they cannot speak clearly or cannot hear. Correspondingly, think of how those without disabilities have benefited from what those with disabilities can give us thanks to today's technology: Communications among friends and loved ones can be enhanced by hearing aids; Cambridge professor Stephen Hawking who has ALS (commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease) is able to continue his work in theoretical physics, sharing his knowledge through the use of an augmentative communication device such as a voice synthesizer with students who may someday uncover the secrets of the universe.

As our society evolves in today's world dominated by technology and information, a division of people into "haves" and "have-nots" is simply not acceptable. A mere physical disability must not be the reason someone is left behind. In December 1992, President Clinton summed up the situation clearly and succinctly:

> "In a competitive global economy, our country does not have a single person to waste. Opportunity must be open to everyone...I believe our entire nation will share in the economic and social benefits that will result from full participation of Americans with disabilities in our society."

Computer-based communications and technology have opened an entire vista previously inaccessible to those with limitations of hearing, vision, speech, or information processing. On-line services can provide a wide variety of communicative media including visual displays, Braille display, or machine-generated speech. For someone who cannot use a keyboard, infrared eye tracking can allow him or her to explore the world through cyber-paths.

Anyone who has ventured onto the Internet or World Wide Web can attest to the vast array of opportunities it provides. AT can provide these opportunities to those with disabilities, enabling them to make choices and advocate for themselves. When this occurs, we are *all* enriched. In the past, someone with a disability may have required governmental financial aid. Today, that same person can be running a business over the Internet and be self-supporting. The possibilities are endless!

A Brief History of ATRC ~ What We've Accomplished

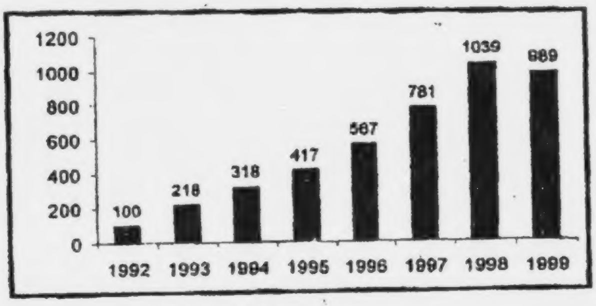
ATRC began as the Hawaii Assistive Technology Training & Services (HATTS) project under the Hawaii Centers for Independent Living (HCIL) in October 1991 in order to carry out the federal mandates of the 1988 Tech Act. The 1994 revision of the Tech Act and the passage of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (the AT Act) offered us opportunities to expand our scope of work. In 1998, at the recommendation of the HATTS Advisory Council (consisting of both AT consumers and providers), we established ourselves as a separate private non-profit corporation to further develop our focus on assistive technology. As an independent agency, we are able to respond specifically to the needs of consumers and service providers and thus act as a force to level the playing field for people with disabilities in our technology oriented society. On November 1, 1999, we changed our name to Assistive Technology Training Centers of Hawaii to better reflect who we are and what we do.

In our nine years of existence, we've accomplished a lot and we've demonstrated the need for services:

- The number of our information and referral contacts has skyrocketed from 100 in 1992--our first full year of operation--to approximately 1000 in 1999.

The demographics of these contacts have also changed:

- In 1992, most contacts were with agency personnel calling on behalf of clients; in 1998, more than half of calls requesting information or services were from consumers, family members or friends.
- In 1993, inquiries were by or for persons in two primary age groups—those 20 years or younger and those aged 61 or older; by 1995, the average age for callers or those represented was 43.



Information & Referral Contacts

In 1998, 28% of contacts received a total of 258 follow-up calls from ATRC staff ensuring that the information they had received was appropriate and met their needs. That same year, we referred 300 people to local vendors; as appropriate, many of these were referred to more than one vendor.

An important component of our effort has been the strong inter-agency collaboration on both the national and local levels. ATRC is a member of the Association of Tech Act Projects (ATAP), a nationwide non-profit with 47 members. One of ATAP's primary goals is to help formulate and direct national policies related to assistive technology. Membership in ATAP gives us the opportunity to make sure that our perspective is heard. This is vital for persons with disabilities in Hawaii, where isolation from the Mainland as well as the fact that our population is spread over six islands presents additional barriers to accessibility.

On the local level ATRC is proud to be a part of DiverseAbilities, a collaboration that also includes the Hawaii Centers for Independent Living, the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Hawaii, and Winners at Work. These four independent non-profit agencies work together to provide people with disabilities vastly improved opportunities for learning, living, working, and participating in the common life of their communities. Another major joint effort is our work with the Disability & Communications Access Board and HCIL to organize the Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation "Tools For Life" Expositions. These two-day events, co-sponsored by American Savings Bank, provide a forum that increases public awareness of assistive technology and lets both AT consumers and the general public know about the available technology. Expositions have been held in 1997 and 1998. ATRC is the major coordinator for the third "Tools For Life" exposition that will take place in March 2000, and we are very pleased that the Hawaii HomeCare Association has joined us, along with the Center for Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii.

> "I can't believe these wonderful and useful gadgets existed. [illegible] I can't thank you enough!"
>
> [illegible], Honolulu

ATRC training conferences and workshops also serve to increase public awareness of AT as well as provide consumer-specific information. Since 1997, these events have included:

- "Educational Technology Initiatives: A Common Agenda between the U.S. and Japan", an initiative by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Japan hosted by ATRC,
- "Speech-to-speech relay service", a workshop and demonstration,
- "The Politics of Assistive Technology", a three-day workshop,
- "Fundamentals in AT Training and Services" (co-sponsored with the Rehabilitation Engineering & the AT Society of North America). These seminars train participants in assessment, problem solving, and a code of ethics, and prepare them for a certification examination as AT practitioners or suppliers, and
- A series of workshops to share creative technology solutions.

Some of our proudest achievements have been:

- The establishment of eight equipment loan banks statewide (see Appendix A for details) where consumers may borrow available and appropriate items at no charge for up to six weeks to see if the technology suits them and meets their needs before they actually acquire it.
- The implementation of the Hawaii Assistive Technology (HAT) Loan Program in cooperation with American Savings Bank that can provide qualified applicants with low interest loans ranging from $500 to $30,000 for any item that falls within the realm of technology. Loans can also be used for training, repair, and maintenance. American Savings Bank, who actually makes the loans, co-administers this program. The ATRC Executive Committee reviews appeal requests for those who are not funded and meets quarterly to review program policies and guidelines. To assist those who are interested, ATRC has published a "HAT Loan Program Fact Sheet" as well as program guidelines.
- The establishment of our Resource Center where technology is demonstrated using twenty Macintosh computers, ten IBM compatible personal computers, and other computer-related equipment such as computer access products, scanners, and digital video cameras. At the Resource Center, AT consumers or other agency personnel can receive training on multimedia development, website design, and augmentative communication strategies or computer access products such as adaptive keyboards or alternative computer mouse controls. We also are able to demonstrate Dragon Naturally Speaking software, the world's first large vocabulary, continuous speech recognition system. Just imagine what it would mean if you were paralyzed from the neck down but could operate a computer by speaking!

ATRC is also proud to be the facilitating agency in bringing "Newsline for the Blind"® to Hawaii beginning in 2000, thanks to a generous grant from the Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. This program of the National Federation of the Blind uses computer technology to convert the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times plus other selected national and local newspapers to voice recordings. In Hawaii, our own Honolulu Advertiser is available through this service. Subscribers dial a local telephone number at *their* convenience and choose which articles they would like to listen to. Obviously, this is a breakthrough compared to having only a few items selected by volunteers read on the radio each day at a specific set time.

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It is important that information on assistive technology is shared with those who need it. In addition to information on the loan program, ATRC produces a newsletter that is sent out to consumers and interested persons statewide, along with brochures and other handouts. We also publish and distribute guides to AT law and self-advocacy and funding resources. Our *Funding Resource Guide* for service providers, assistive technology users, and anyone who is seeking financial assistance to obtain assistive technology is intended to alleviate the funding barrier to technology. This could potentially enhance the independence and quality of life of more than 223,000 persons in our state--about 20% of the total population!

To improve access to funding for assistive technology, the *Guide* offers a "Step by Step Guide to Obtaining Funding" as well as a "funding tree" that graphically displays the contents of the guide in order to provide a blueprint for determining a successful strategy for identifying the most appropriate resources available and the most effective way to positively influence these resources. The *Guide* also provides a "list of resources" with a brief overview of each, the geographic areas covered, the eligibility criteria and application processes.

Our handy booklet Na Mea Kokua No Na Kapuna: Helpful Tools for Senior Citizens discusses different areas of daily living activities, including cooking, eating, recreation, communication, etc. Since its original printing in 1997, more than 10,000 copies have been distributed across the islands. This booklet has served as a model for other states who have literally copied it, simply adding appropriate local information.

ATRC is a service-oriented agency. In addition to demonstrating technology at our Resource Center, we provide training to persons with disabilities, their families, and service providers including teachers, vocational rehabilitation professionals, therapists, etc. on a variety of general and assistive technology topics ranging from basic keyboarding to web-site development to integration of AT into networked environments. Other services provided by ATRC include, but are not limited to:

> I called your office and requested some materials regarding magnifiers for my mom who is visually impaired. I thank you so much for sending me the information so promptly and for all the materials [illegible]
>
> [illegible]
>
> Honolulu

- Multimedia development for the customization of learning experiences for children,
- Non-linear video editing, production, and captioning to assist persons with disabilities create video portfolios, documentaries, and video letters,
- Web design and development,
- Assistive technology assessment and technical support, and
- Distance-learning and other technology-mediated learning opportunities.

All of these services are provided in a supportive environment that seeks to fully integrate consumers into the general community. ATRC offers practicum possibilities for university students as well as a chance for high school students to volunteer. These opportunities not only benefit the community of people with disabilities, but also ATRC as an agency. More importantly, however, it is our hope that the knowledge gained by these students in working with consumers will help to break down the barriers faced by those with disabilities created by a lack of understanding of their potential.

Our Role As An Advocate for Persons with Disabilities

ATRC serves as a program advocate for persons with disabilities. Our driving force is to make it easier for individuals with disabilities to acquire the assistive technology they need. We recognize the need for a statewide infrastructure that will allow for timely access to the more

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than 26,000 AT devices products currently available as well as needed services. Therefore, one of our primary goals is to bring about change within the system through:

- Development, implementation, and monitoring of policies, regulations, and procedures which improve the funding of, access to, and provision of AT,
- Identification of funding and policy-related barriers to the acquisition of assistive technology and developing strategies to overcome hurdles,
- Facilitation of statewide interagency cooperation by working with the ATRC Policy Coordinating Committee, and training State agency representatives,
- Provision of information on national and State AT policies through Consumer Resource Specialists and Community Task Forces in each county, and
- Solicitation of community input on policy issues, and coordination with the ATRC Community Advisory Committee.

We've truly had an impact: ATRC is one of the key players in the AT public policy arena in Hawaii. The collaborative efforts of agencies focusing on persons with disabilities and legislators have resulted in important regulatory and legislative changes:

- The HAT Loan program was established in 1994 as a result of a waiver obtained by ATRC from the U.S. Department of Education to retain the necessary funding.
- Assistive technology procedural guidelines interpreting the federal IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) were developed in 1995 in collaboration with the Hawaii Department of Education.
- The AT Warranty Act of 1997 ensured that all assistive devices sold in our state have a one-year warranty that means that the item must be repaired to the satisfaction of the consumer or replaced.
- Guide dogs for the blind were exempted from the 120-day quarantine for animals entering the state as a result of statutory changes effective in 1998.
- Senate Concurrent Resolution Number 18 in 1999 requested the Governor incorporate AT considerations and language in all administration measures relating to persons with disabilities and to work to encourage an increase in AT supplies in Hawaii.

ATRC is continuing its advocacy work to initiate systemic changes that will advance the recognition and role of assistive technology. Areas of potential impact include:

- Encouraging small businesses and entrepreneurs who deal with AT,
- Ensuring that children and adults who are supplied with AT devices can utilize them to their fullest potential, and
- Arranging for financial assistance for those who cannot afford repair or replacement for AT devices after the initial warranty has expired.

In order to facilitate these changes, ATRC is the most appropriate agency for designation and funding as the official Hawaii State resource for assistive technology.

> I finally got it! I am amazed with the technology and what it means to people with disabilities. As the chair of the Human Services & Housing Committee, it means a lot to me to have these new technologies and especially a consumer providing a demonstration and personal testimony. You can count on my support to [illegible] of these technological advances for the disabled.
>
> Mahalo,
> Rep. Dennis Arakaki

A Short History of the AT Movement

The best-known piece of legislation and public policy relating to persons with disabilities is Public Law 101-336, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was enacted on July 26, 1990. The purpose of the ADA is "to provide a clear and comprehensive mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities." The ADA clearly

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has had an impact in terms of removal of physical barriers (e.g., replacing steps with ramps) and has led to the wider use of assistive technology. Today, many public conveyances such as city buses have lifts to allow those in wheelchairs the opportunity to use them. Employers must also make *reasonable* accommodation for those with disabilities, including the acquisition of appropriate assistive technology where feasible.

The push to make our society more inclusive of those with disabilities began several years prior to the ADA. In 1984, the Center for Information Technology Accommodation (CITA) was established as a model demonstration facility and it continues to work to ensure accessible information environments, services, and management practices. In 1986, Congress passed a law so that procurement policies of the federal government ensure that persons with disabilities can have access to electronic office equipment.

The real landmark for assistive technology came with the passage of P.L. 100-407 in 1988: The Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals With Disabilities Act (the Tech Act). This was the first major piece of national legislation dealing directly with assistive technology. With an initial funding allocation, the Tech Act sought to initiate systemic changes to begin breaking down barriers faced by those with disabilities. Projects focusing on assistive technology and involving consumers—including ATRC--were funded in all fifty states and six territories with a goal of increasing accessibility.

The AT projects in each state are designed to

1. provide access to computer-based/multimedia information on the use of assistive technology,
2. develop demonstration centers where individuals with disabilities, may go to try out different pieces of equipment,
3. provide consultants, to help individuals make informed decisions about equipment,
4. provide referral services, and
5. provide training to both individuals with disabilities and others.

On the national level, work done through the Association of Tech Act Projects, RESNA and other advocacy groups has resulted in the following federal legislation enacted since 1988:

- The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- The Telecommunications Accessibility Enhancement Act helps people with hearing or speech limitations access the federal telecommunications system (1996)
- The Technology-Related Assistance For Individuals With Disabilities Act Of 1988 As Amended in 1994 to reauthorize the Tech Act and continue funding of agencies such as ATRC
- The "National Information Infrastructure: Agenda for Action" in 1994, a major, multi-faceted initiative by the federal government to break down barriers to the national information infrastructure so that everyone who desires it, including those with disabilities, has easy and affordable access to advanced communications and information services
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) to ensure that all children have an opportunity to receive an education and to require states to provide appropriate AT for children with disabilities as deemed necessary by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team
- The Assistive Technology Act of 1998 to guarantee that states actively work to promote public awareness of available technology, technical assistance and training for targeted individuals, technology demonstration programs, and other proven priorities, including access to the Internet
- The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) to consolidate, coordinate, and improve employment, training, literacy, and vocational rehabilitation programs
- Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 to give people who want to work a chance to

do so by removing the out-dated rules that end Medicaid and Medicare coverage when people with disabilities return to work. It modernizes the employment services system for people with disabilities. And, it affirms the basic principle manifested in the Americans with Disabilities Act: that all Americans should have the same opportunities to be productive citizens

At the time this report was written, action was pending on a formal request for Medicare coverage of augmentative communications devices that was submitted to the Health Care Financing Administration on December 31, 1999. Senators Akaka and Inouye and Representatives Abercrombie and Mink have expressed their support for the request. Action is required within 90 days.

Our Vision For the Future

As the only non-profit agency in our state dedicated to assistive technology issues, ATRC is developing our presence as the primary information and referral source, and expanding outreach efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of AT.

Information and referral is a vital service, both on the individual level as well as for other agencies, including those in the public sector. A consumer or interested party such as a service provider may intuitively feel that there must be suitable assistive devices available but have no idea what they are or how they might be accessed. This is where ATRC's expertise can provide the needed direction so that the consumer can make an informed, independent choice as to the most appropriate product available, how it can be obtained (including financial issues) and training on how to use and maintain the device.

Outreach is focused on educating people with disabilities and their families, service providers, and other professionals as to what assistive technology is and its impact when included in life planning. For a child with a disability, the barriers to educational opportunities can literally be erased with access to computers and the Internet. The same applies to adult employment opportunities for a person who is given the appropriate tools or technology. The ability to live independently can be greatly extended, benefiting not only the individual utilizing the technology, but also reducing the time required for caregiving, thus conserving precious resources.

> We thoroughly enjoyed the presentation, the [illegible] materials and the demonstration of assistive technology. The [illegible] received and very helpful and useful, especially the other items that we can use to assist us in our daily living activities.
> Melvin C.Y. Whang, MPH
> OKAK Editor
> Ohana Kokua Ano Kuli (OKAK)

Given the vast potential that assistive technology can unleash, it is critical that all people—not just AT consumers—understand that the access technology provides is a *necessity*, not simply an add-on or a luxury, enabling those with disabilities to live their lives to the fullest. For example, many streets and buildings now have ramps rather than steps to enhance access for those with a physical disability. But if a person cannot get to that street or building because they do not a wheelchair or other mobility device, of what benefit is the ramp? Bifocal glasses are considered a necessity for those with presbyopia so that they don't have to hold reading materials at arm's length. Why shouldn't someone with a different and more severe vision disability whose work involves computers have access to magnification technology that allows them to maintain a comfortable, ergonomically correct posture when viewing their monitor?

These are the concerns that we will continue to address until assistive technology is fully integrated into the norm of human experience. In order to achieve this, we need to focus on two major issues at this point: Access to technology and the financial solvency of our agency.

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Barriers to Accessing Available Technology

As a geographically isolated state with a relatively small population, the access problems our consumers face are magnified. The challenge of being distant from the Mainland is compounded by the fact that consumers live on six islands. Because the total population of persons with disabilities in Hawaii is a relatively low number in terms of marketing potential, the economics of providing products and services can be less than optimal. The small number of vendors in our state, a lack of vendor support, and the difficulty in obtaining proper maintenance and repair locally are significant factors that need to be addressed. ATRC is working with vendors and consumers to develop strategies to overcome these barriers by encouraging entrepreneurs to sell assistive devices and expand repair and maintenance services. Dana Eudaley, an AT consumer who lives in Kona, became a vendor himself in order to access the technology he uses and is well aware of the challenges of finding parts and keeping qualified repair technicians, especially on sparsely populated rural islands.

Geography also proves to be a deterrent in other ways. Damage can occur during shipping, and the humidity of a tropical climate and exposure to salt air can also result in deterioration of equipment. Tania Farley Huff, formerly with the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at San Diego State University, has noted that there are certain areas of the Pacific where a cultural bias exists against people with disabilities acquiring assistive technology.

Even if some of these barriers can be overcome, there is still the lack of qualified people to perform AT assessments to ensure that consumers are getting the most appropriate devices for their individual situations. If the technology does not specifically address the needs of a particular individual, it simply will not be used.

Lastly, there are the financial concerns related to access. Vendors may be reluctant to market their products in certain states because of difficulties created by tax laws. An individual consumer may not be aware of available financial assistance. And even though a purchase may be pre-approved, there can be problems with third party payers such as Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurers.

ATRC is working to resolve some of these issues in both the legislative and private arenas. As mentioned above, we have been a key player in securing the passage of legislation that will have a positive impact on persons with disabilities in Hawaii. In our island community, we held a half-day symposium in February 1997 with representatives of both the public and private sectors to address vendor-related issues. At the 1998 Harry & Jeannette Weinberg Foundation "Tools for Life" Expo, ATRC conducted a workshop that focused on the disability advocate as an entrepreneur. These sessions have proven to be fertile ground for creative ideas that we can then use to expand access to the available technology.

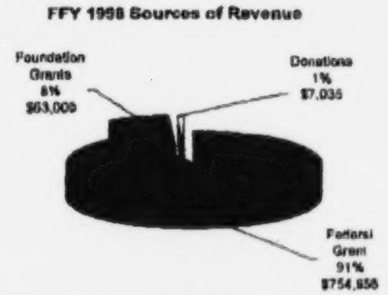
Most recently, ATRC sponsored the AT Practitioner & Vendor Exam, a certification program of RESNA, the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America. Participants sit for either the Practitioner Certificate (primarily for service providers involved in the analysis of consumer needs and training in the use of a particular device) or the Supplier Certificate (for those involved in the sales and services of commercially available devices). Prior to this exam there was only one RESNA-certified practitioner (a former ATRC employee) in our entire state. We were pleased that twenty people sat for the exam in November 1999. Of these, fifteen--including two ATRC staff members--received certification as AT Practitioners; one person was certified as an AT Supplier. We believe that this is a good indication of how ATRC has helped raise awareness of and interest in assistive technology issues.

Our Current Financial Picture

ATRC's financial stability as an organization is the other significant issue that we must address on a priority basis.

When ATRC was formed in 1991 as the HATTS project under the Hawaii Centers for Independent Living, we were funded completely through the Tech Act appropriation. At that time we had only five staff members, a total budget of $417,300 and outreach to islands other than Oahu was very limited. As a separate non-profit agency, ATRC is a stable and vital organization dedicated to our mission and to providing service throughout our island community in the most responsive and efficient manner possible. Over the past eight years we've expanded our services, both in terms of what we are able to offer our consumers and our area of coverage. Currently, ATRC operates with ten staff working out of our central office.

The majority of funds currently supporting ATRC are received as a result of the 1994 reauthorization of the Tech Act that originally created and funded programs focusing on assistive technology. For Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 1998 which runs from October 1, 1998 through September 30, 1999, we received a federal grant in the amount of $754, 956. During that same time period, we also received individual contributions totaling $7,035 and $63,000 from private foundations for specific projects.



ATRC spent its entire FFY 1998 federal grant in the following budget categories:

Federal Grant Expenditures – 10/1/98 – 9/30/99

Personal Services (7 staff positions)		$ 290,324
· Salary	240,637.00	
· Employee Benefits	24,872.00	
· Payroll Taxes	24,815.00	
Travel (including 34 trips to other islands)		$ 20,960
Facilities Costs		$ 56,320
· Telephone	15,971.00	
· Occupancy	40,349.00	
Other Contractual Costs		$ 297,108
· Audit & Accounting	10,124.00	
· Contract Services (2 Training Associates and legal services)	221,503.00	
· Postage and Delivery	6,239.00	
· Equipment Rental	2,610.00	
· Printing and Reproduction	6,373.00	
· Training & Conferences	11,611.00	
· Insurance	5,594.00	
· Advertising	2,230.00	
· Dues, Licenses, & Fees (including asset depreciation)	30,918.00	
Supplies		$ 10,496
Equipment		$ 79,748
Total		$ 754,956

"This packet of information on augmentative communication devices and funding . . . will be very helpful to us as we endeavor to obtain appropriate communication equipment for our clients. . . . [illegible] efficient office."
— Kathleen L. English [illegible]
Home and Community [illegible] Services
Easter Seal Society

Of our federal funding expenditures in 1998, $664,361, or 88% was spent for ATRC direct program services. Administrative and overhead costs are kept low, and were only 12% ($90,595) of our total budget.

As shown above, ATRC currently is funded primarily with federal Tech Act monies. However, these funds are being phased out over the next three years in accordance with the provisions of the 1994 reauthorization legislation. Beginning with FFY 1999 (October 1, 1999 through September 30, 2000), ATRC's federal funding has been decreased 25% from $754,956 in FFY 1998 to $566,217. On October 1 of this year, our federal support will be reduced again by 33% of the FFY 1999 level to $377,478 annually. The federal grant will remain at this level until October 1, 2003, at which point federal funding will cease. ATRC and all of the other assistive technology projects across the United States face dramatic cuts over the next few years unless alternate sources of funds can be found.

Obviously, we are extremely concerned about these cuts and have begun to explore ways to maintain resources so that we can continue our work. However, if an adequate level of financial support is not realized, services will have to be reduced commensurately. While ATRC as an agency could and would adapt to a reduced revenue situation, more significant is the impact cutbacks in service would have on consumers and the community at large. When people with disabilities can be more independent, advocate for themselves and live up to their fullest potential, our entire community benefits. Not only are precious resources—both human and financial—are conserved by having to provide less assistance to those with disabilities, but *everyone* in our community contributing to a richer and more diverse society.

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APPENDIX A - ATRC Equipment Loan Sites

Unless otherwise noted, all loan sites have available a variety of low technology devices (kitchen aids, dressing aids, mobility aids, toys), tools for persons with visual or hearing impairments, and communication devices.

OAHU

Windward Area Agency
Special Education Center of Hawaii
407 Uluniu Street Suite 202
Kailua, HI 96734
Phone: 263-7809

Gallaudet University Regional Center
c/o Kapiolani Community College
4303 Diamond Head Road
Honolulu, HI 96816
Phone: 734-9210 (voice/TDD)
Specializing in devices for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing

Aloha Special Technology Access Center (Aloha STAC)
710 Green Street
Honolulu, HI 96814
Phone: 523-5547
Contact: Eric Arveson
Specializing in communication devices, switches and computer-related equipment

Special Note: Until the Waimano Training School & Hospital was closed in December, 1999, ATRC operated an equipment loan site at the facility. We anticipate re-opening a loan site in leeward Oahu sometime during 2000.

HAWAII

Friends of the Future/Tutu's House
Parker Ranch Shopping Center
67-1185 Mamalahoa Highway Suite 9
Kamuela, HI 96743
Phone: 885-8336
Specializing in communications devices, switches and computer-related equipment

West Hawaii Center for Independent Living
81-6627 Mamalahoa Highway Suite B-5
Kealakekua, HI 96750
Phone: 323-2221
TDD: 323-2262

KAUAI

Lihue Public Library
4344 Hardy Street
Lihue, HI 96766
Phone: 241-3222

MAUI

Kahalui Public Library
90 School Street
Kahalui, Hawaii 96732
Phone: 873-3097

APPENDIX B - The People of ATRC of Hawaii

The ATRC Board of Directors:
- Peter Fritz, President*
- Jim Kahler, Vice-President
- Diane Sakumoto, Secretary
- Susan Yoshimoto, Treasurer
- Patricia Blum*
- Sally Morgan
- Alisa Mitchener*
- Rodney Pang
- Bob Proffitt*
- Peggy Proffitt*
- Mel Whang*

The ATRC Advisory Council:
- Dan Anderson, EdD
- Eric Arveson
- Anthony Baccay
- Valerie Chang
- Sen. Suzanne Chun-Oakland
- Terry Hayes
- Sterling Krysler*
- Jennifer Lee
- John Manion, Esq.
- Karen McCarty*
- Paul McCarty*
- Arde Long-Yamashita*
- Kathy Ratliffe, PhD

ATRC Policy Coordinating Committee:
(Appointed by the Governor)
- June Callan, Department of Education
- Ann Ito*, University of Hawaii
- Tom Jackson, Department of Labor & Industrial Relations
- Shawn Luiz*, Hawaii Disability Rights Center
- Mark Obatake*, Hawaii Center for Independent Living
- Marilyn Seely, Executive Office on Aging
- Tom Smyth, Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism
- Guy Tagomori, Dep't of Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Michael Tamanaha, Department of Health
- Diana Tizard*, Department of Health
- Charlotte Townsend*, Department of Health
- Marge Wada, Department of Health
- Mie Watanabe, University of Hawaii

ATRC Staff:
- Executive Director, Barbara Fischlowitz-Leong*, MEd
- Training Director, Darin Uesugi, MPH, ATP**
- Training Associate, Kelly Roberts, MS, ATP**
- Training Associate, Jim Skouge, EdD
- Funding & Policy Analyst, Tim Brannan, JD
- Information & Resource Coordinator, Judith Clark, MPH
- Information & Outreach Specialist, Kimberly Shiraishi*, BS
- Administrative Assistant, Ellen Cheng, BBA
- Secretary, Karen Toyama

*Person with a disability or has an immediate family member with a disability
**RESNA-Certified assistive technology Practitioner

Assistive Technology Resource Centers of Hawaii is an equal opportunity employer and complies with Title II of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. This publication is available in alternate communications formats upon request. To make arrangements, contact the ATRC office at (808) 532-7110 (voice or TDD) or e-mail to atrc@atrc.org.

T · H · E
OHIO
STATE
UNIVERSITY

Assistive Technology of Ohio

J. L. Camera Center
2050 Kenny Road, 9th Floor
Columbus, OH 43221

Phone	614-292-2426 800-784-3425 614-292-3162 TTY
FAX	614-292-5866
E-mail	atohio@osu.edu
Website	www.atohio.org

Wednesday, March 20, 2002

The Honorable Buck McKeon, Chair
21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee
House Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman McKeon and members of the 21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee:

I would like to thank the Committee for holding an oversight hearing on The Assistive Technology Act on Thursday, March 21, 2002. It is important for Committee members as well as all members of Congress, their staff and the general public to understand the crucial and significant roll that Tech Act projects perform in aiding Americans with disabilities in obtaining assistive technology and assistive services.

Please find attached a brief summary of some of the services provided to people with disabilities across the state by Assistive Technology of Ohio, the Tech Act project in Ohio located at The Ohio State University. I hope that this information will be useful to you as you hold hearings on the importance of the Tech Act and would be pleased if you would include our attachment as part of the hearing record.

Thank you for holding this essential and valuable hearing. Please let my staff or me know if we can provide you with any additional information. I look forward to working with you to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the assistive technology that they need to live independent, productive lives.

Sincerely,

Douglas C. Huntt, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Assistive Technology of Ohio

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Assistive Technology of Ohio

J. L. Camera Center
2050 Kenny Road, 9th Floor
Columbus, OH 43221

Phone 614-292-2426
800-784-3425
614-292-3162 TTY
FAX 614-292-5866
E-mail atohio@osu.edu
Website www.atohio.org

Assistive Technology Act of 1988 - Assistive Technology of Ohio (AT Ohio)

The Ohio Tech Act project was awarded to the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) in 1992. After being reorganized in 1994, the project was moved to The Ohio State University.

Leveraging New Dollars

- The project was able for the first time to secure state dollars, $50,000 for each Fiscal Year in 2002 & 2003. This was a major accomplishment for the project concerning the tight budgetary constraints placed on the state from September 11th, the economy and an Ohio Supreme Court decision requiring an increase in funding for education from a 1990 lawsuit.
- The project also recently created a non-profit arm of the program, the Buckeye Assistive Technology Network (BATN), which will enable the project to increase efforts to compete for other funding opportunities and resources.

Low-Interest Loan Program

- AT Ohio's partner, Fifth Third Bank of Columbus, is assisting in expanding the programs reach by tying together a number of the Bank's already prosperous loan programs into a package of loans to better assist people with disabilities in obtaining the funding they need for assistive technology.
- AT Ohio and Fifth Third Bank have been successful in also getting the state of Ohio, Office of the Treasury to partner in the program, adding a state link-deposit loan program to the mix of funding opportunities.
- Fifth Third Bank has pledged to match any new loan dollars that AT Ohio is able to bring to the program (including additional federal dollars).

Public Awareness and Outreach

- Project staff conduct consumer forums across the state on assistive technology and makes presentations at a variety of technology-related expositions, conventions and seminars and/or man exhibits or booths explaining the project and assistive technology.
- AT Ohio supports a regional center in Southeast Ohio (Marietta) and three regional consultants, to provide regional and community-based assistive technology programs and services to individuals with disabilities across the state.
- Assistive technology and assistive services information dissemination and to individuals with disabilities throughout state.
- Project staff serve on various state boards and commissions, disability organizations and coalitions and consumer advisory groups.

Adaptive Equipment & Toy Lending Library

- Pilot program in Washington County Library System created by AT Ohio to increase availability of adaptive toys and learning devices that are used as instructional and teaching aids for children and young adults in rural Ohio.
- Second County, Champaign, in the process of being completed and open for adaptive equipment loans with discussions beginning in Preble and Adams Counties.
- AT Ohio will make presentation to Ohio Library Association Convention in September concerning the program.

Computer Refurbish and Exchange Program

- Partnership with Washington State Community College (location of Marietta Office) and Department of Computers Services.
- Donated surplus and used computers are cleaned, fixed and upgraded by students and college staff and then sold to lower-income consumers with disabilities for cost of upgrade parts (usually under $250). AT Ohio also aids in purchasing or getting donated assistive technology software or equipment for the computers.

Public Policy and Advocacy

- Current activities of project staff include working with state government on the following issues: creation of web accessibility policy; implementation of a Medicaid-Buy In program; further expansion of the sales tax exemption for assistive technology and services; increased screening of new born babies, reduced costs for prescription drugs; increasing AT funding in the next state budget cycle for special Education and AT Ohio.
- Past activities included assistance in the implementation of an assistive technology lemon law; increased handicapped parking fines, improved efficiency and operations of MRDD County Boards; creation of an abuse registry within the Dept. of MRDD, increased penalties for the exploitation of people with disabilities and the elderly; increased eligibility (indexed to inflation) for the homestead exemption tax credit (a property tax credit); and limiting the budget cuts to disability programs and agencies in the current fiscal year that was needed to balance the state budget.
- Project staff have also worked closely with the Governor's Office and the General Assembly in encouraging greater participation and an increased presence of people with disabilities on Boards and Commissions, within state agencies, legislative staffs and other elected offices.

WHAT OHIO LOSES WITH SUNSET OF TECH ACT PROJECTS

$390,000 in federal funding for Assistive Technology of Ohio, the Tech Act project for the state, that translates into the following loss of benefits (AT Ohio is in its 10th year of funding):

- Infrastructure to leverage new dollars for assistive technology for people with disabilities from the state of Ohio, from other grants and from businesses. The future of two grant awards that the project has applied would be lost without Tech Act Project Infrastructure: an AgrAbility grant to help farmers with disabilities obtain assistive technology and a Vocational Rehabilitation Training.
- Infrastructure to continue operation of statewide low-interest loan program for people with disabilities to obtain assistive technology and assistive services would disappear. Interest generated from loan program is used to fund loan interest buy downs. In addition, infrastructure to apply for future federal grants under Title III of the AT Act from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation (NIDRR) to expand low-interest loan program would be lost.
- The infrastructure to provide legislative education, training and advocacy to state and local government officials and their on the importance and need of assistive technology for people with disabilities in the state of Ohio.
- Infrastructure needed to maintain various AT Ohio programs including: Computer and Refurbish and Exchange Program; Adaptive Equipment & Toy Lending Library; wiring of MRDD schools to the Internet (schools were not included in the state's computer technology and wiring program, SchoolNet); ramp project pilot program which consists of building wheelchair access ramps for low-income families with disabilities with donated labor from career centers; continued operation of Technology Resource Center; and other activities and programs for people with disabilities to obtain assistive technology would be lost.

If you have questions regarding this information, please contact Eric T. Rathburn at rathburn.17@osu.edu or by phone at 614-292-2426.

KATS N•E•T•W•O•R•K

"Disability Solutions Through Technology"

Kentucky Assistive Technology Service Network
Coordinating Center
Charles McDowell Center
8412 Westport Road
Louisville, KY 40242

FAX: 502-327-9974
E-Mail: katsnet@iglou.com
World Wide Web: http://www.katsnet.org

Toll Free (Voice): 800-327-5287
Local (Voice): 502-327-0022
TDD: 502-327-9855

March 19, 2002

The Honorable Howard "Buck" McKeon, Chairman
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
United States House of Representatives

Subject: Hearing on Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (ATAct)

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of over three quarters of a million Kentuckians with disabilities, I want to thank you and the Subcommittee for conducting this hearing. It is noteworthy to mention that the provision of assistive technology is so important in Kentucky that both Senators McConnell and Bunning supported last year's waiver of the ATAct sunset clause contained in the Appropriations Bill and the entire Kentucky Congressional Delegation singed off on the "Dear Colleague" letter in support of the one year extension to allow for this opportunity to demonstrate the importance that the state Tech Act Projects hold for Americans with disabilities.

As a high level quadriplegic since 1950 who relies heavily on assistive technology to work and whose work mission is to serve a third of the Kentuckians with disabilities who also use and/or need assistive technology for their education and employment, I can speak with absolute and total conviction about the major impact that assistive technology can make in the daily lives of persons who need it. Having lived most my life without AT, I am now constantly thinking -- I can't believe I'm doing this by myself!

In spite of efforts to coordinate federally funded assistive technology, there is still massive duplication and waste for the government and desperate consumers left to navigate the disconnected array of agencies that are often not aware of each other's services. As do all state Tech Act Projects which uniquely offer AT services for ALL ages and ALL disabilities, the Kentucky program constantly works to address this and other issues to increase the efficiency of federal funds across programs by creating or adopting model programs to get the most appropriate AT devices and services to those who need them for the least cost. This has only been possible due to the ATAct Title I program. Without it, much would be lost, and consumers would be on their own to find and acquire appropriate assistive technology. Without the federal AT program, businesses, schools, consumers and the entire state would lose the enormous benefits of the infrastructure that the Title I programs have built.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. To help the Subcommittee more fully understand what funding of the Title I program has meant for coordination of assistive technology services in Kentucky and what the loss of this funding would mean for Kentuckians with disabilities, I have attached a brief Outline of the Kentucky AT Program – known as the KATS Network. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chase Forrester

Chase Forrester, JD
Director

Attachment

cc: Rep. Patsy Mink, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
Rep. John Boehner, Chairman, Committee on Education & the Workforce
Rep. George Miller, Ranking Member, Committee on Education & the Workforce
Rep. Ernest Fletcher, Committee on Education & the Workforce

Regional Assistive Technology Resource Centers
• • • • • •
Enabling Technologies of Kentuckiana
• Louisville •
800-890-1840
• • • • • •
Bluegrass Technology Center
• Lexington •
800-209-7767
• • • • • •
Redwood Rehab Center
• Ft. Mitchell •
800-728-9807
• • • • • •
Western Kentucky Assistive Consortium
• Murray •
800-209-6202
• • • • • •
Appalachia Assistive Technology Consortium at
Carl D. Perkins Rehab Center
• Thelma •
800-443-2187
• • • • • •
Cumberland River Comp. Care Center
• Corbin •
606-528-7081

Workforce Development Cabinet • Department for the Blind • Equal Service and Employment Opportunities • M/F/D

Outline – Assistive Technology Act of 1998 Program in Kentucky

Kentucky Assistive Technology Service (KATS) Network

What the KATS Network Does:

- The KATS Network is the **only statewide organization** that coordinates efforts to increase access to assistive technology in order to improve the quality of life of people of **ALL ages and ALL disabilities**.
- The KATS Network provides technical assistance on assistive technology to state policy makers in order to improve state policies and programs on behalf of people with disabilities.
- The KATS Network provides information and referral services, training, and technical assistance on assistive technology to thousands of consumers and service providers each year.

State Impacts on People:

- Statistics for the Fiscal Year 2001 show that the KATS Network was responsible for 20,582 service contacts for 13,966 consumers and providers throughout Kentucky, and through outreach efforts provided Assistive Technology information to an estimated 7,165 people across the state.

Numbers of Individuals Served	FY2000	FY2001	% Change
Consumers	4,283	4,829	+12.75%
Professionals	9,134	9,137	+00.03%
TOTAL	13,417	13,966	+04.09%

Numbers of Services Provided	FY2000	FY2001	% Change
To Consumers	5,006	5,668	+13.22%
To Professionals	15,876	14,914	-06.06%
TOTAL	20,882	20,582	-01.44%

- Some specifics for FY2001 include:

29	Low-interest AT Loans originated	2,352	Equipment loans
1,204	Recycled computers provided to consumers	7,165	Individuals educated through outreach efforts
1,314	Demonstrations and consultations	7,893	Information and referrals to AT funding sources
1,567	Evaluations and assessments		
2,008	Trainings	9,383	Visits to the KATS Network Website

Leveraged Funds made possible through core AT Act funding during FY00/01 only:

In FY00/01 $370,276 in AT Act funding helped to leverage $1,086,300 in additional funding, including:

- $302,100 in additional federal funding – For: Training and technical assistance.
- $226,000 in state and local government funding – For: Training, technical assistance, assessments for schools, etc.
- $558,200 in non-public funding – For: Children's AT programs, improving AT loan library, recycled computer prog.

Long-Term State Impacts:

One very vital impact of AT Act funding at work in Kentucky is coordination of AT technical assistance activities in support of state policy makers. By providing this service, the KATS Network helps implement long-term benefits to people with disabilities in Kentucky. Some of these activities have included:

- In 2000, Kentucky passed an Accessible Information Technology Law (KRS 61.980-988) and the KATS Network has been active in providing ongoing technical assistance during its implementation. This law will ensure that the rapidly developing electronic information technology infrastructure in Kentucky will adopt the same accessibility standards for Kentuckians with disabilities as is now being implemented in all federal agencies under Section 508. The KATS Network is taking a leadership role within the state to facilitate information dissemination about the law's requirements as well as technical assistance for accessible information technology.
- In 1998, the Kentucky General Assembly authorized the creation of the Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Fund (KRS Chapter 151B). The KATS Network continues to facilitate coordination and information dissemination about this program, and to provide technical assistance to the program and guidance to borrowers for the selection of appropriate technology. This low interest loan program is designed for the purchase of assistive technology equipment and services for Kentuckians with disabilities, enabling them to pursue their education, obtain or maintain employment, and improve their quality of life.
- The passage of the Kentucky Assistive Technology Lemon Law in 1998 creating the Assistive Device Warranty Act giving an estimated 254,632 Kentucky users of AT protection against manufacturers defects that cannot be repaired after two attempts or out of service for repairs 30 days.

Other Impacts

(a) Types of programs that have been made possible either wholly or in part through AT Act funds.

- Startup or buildup of 4 regional AT resource centers (ATRC) totally dedicated to the provision of cutting edge AT services staffed by the greatest number of RESNA certified AT Practitioners of any single entity in Kentucky.
- Startup of 2 AT satellite resource centers to serve the extremely remote and rural Appalachian region of Kentucky.
- Several AT lending libraries at ATRCs across the state for consumers to try out AT to make sure it is appropriate.
- Open Lab and Resource Days at ATRCs for the public to increase awareness of assistive technologies.
- Training tours at ATRCs for health care professionals and interns.
- Information and Referral services and guidance to funding resources for the provision of AT devices and services.
- Statewide awareness of AT.
- Numerous AT related education and outreach programs.
- Procurement of equipment.
- State coordination and technical assistance to state policy makers and state agencies.
- Technical assistance to the Kentucky AT Loan program.
- Provide a point of entry and technical assistance for the AT and computer recycling efforts.
- Startup funding for the AgrAbilty AT Mobile Unit that provides AT services to injured farmers so they can continue farming – provide 146 services to consumers and professionals who serve them.

(b) Types of programs that have already suffered due to the 50% reduction of AT Act funding.

- Training tours of ATRCs for Pediatric Interns from University of Kentucky Med School have been reduced.
- ATRC training tours for other student groups from health care and related fields have been reduced.
- Other Information and Referrals services have been reduced.
- Denigration of capacities through loss of highly qualified AT Practitioners to assist consumers and train state providers in the face of an explosion of complicated emerging assistive technology – Loss of 36% of RESNA ATPs by ATRCs.

(c) Types of programs that would either be lost or weakened by the elimination of all AT Act monies.

- All programs would be dramatically weakened.
- Free Open Lab hours would be reduced or eliminated.
- Information and Referral programs would be cut back more, with an approximate loss of 3,000 services per year.
- Reduced staff professional development to keep up with rapidly developing technologies and ability to allow staff time to participate in local, regional, statewide and national interagency and/or coordination efforts.
- Elimination of unique Funding Handbook and reduced ability to mail information to consumers – (Thousands).
- 800 toll free phone numbers will be discontinued for all ATRCs eliminating statewide coordination – 7,000 calls per yr.
- Loss of outreach presence via conference exhibits undertaken by KATS Network Staff which – 4,170 in FY2001.
- Reduced capablity to offer sliding scale fees for individuals with disabilities due to decreased budgets to help support operating costs.

(d) Capacity that will be lost in terms of infrastructure and ability of the state to deal with AT issues, should all AT Act funding disappear.

- There will no longer be a state-level entity to coordinate AT information dissemination and services in Kentucky, to facilitate collaboration among the ATRCs, and to provide statewide coordination efforts on AT issues.
- Capacity to provide technical assistance to state entities regarding Accessible Information Technology will be gone.
- Efforts to increase access to AT through federal and state coordination will cease at the state level.
- Virtually all AT services to the Appalachian region of Kentucky will be lost – 537 individuals served in FY2001
- Funds to buy new equipment as computers become obsolete will be gone.
- Loss of funding to ATRCs for core personnel who generate leveraged grant funding to provide free services.
- ATRCs will have to divert funds from the updating loan library and new demonstration assistive technologies.

(e) Benefits that will be available to citizens of Kentucky from continued and increased AT Act funding.

- Increase the number of free AT services for consumers such as assessments, referrals, and equipment loans, etc.
- Increase training to students and training classes for teachers, AT providers, health care students and professionals.
- Provide badly needed expansion and updating ATRC loan library equipment.
- Continued coordination efforts to promote increased access to AT statewide.
- Assist rural school cooperatives to establish and maintain AT satellite centers to better serve remote areas.
- Establish and train an ATRC in Bowling Green, KY to better serve the underserved southwestern part of the state.
- Improve the ability of the KATS Network and its participating ATRCs to provide long distance services via the internet enhancing their multidiscipline method of consulting on AT evaluations.

Elizabeth A. Morris
100 Carriage Way
Hopkinsville, KY 42240

Chase Forrester
KATS Network
Charles McDowell Center
8412 Westport Road
Louisville, KY 40242

Dear Mr. Forrester,

My husband is in the advanced stages of ALS. For the past year, he has been having difficulty communicating because his speech is barely audible.

That brings me to the reason for to writing you. I contacted Barbara Pugh, who is a Speech-Language Pathologist at the Carl D. Perkins Rehabilitation Center in Thelma, Kentucky, to get information on a speech device. I thought I would try to purchase one for my husband--that is until I learned how expensive they are. Most equipment that we checked into had price tags from $3000 to $5000 for the simpler models; some laptop equipment was as much as $10,000. These devices are not covered by insurance, which makes them unattainable for lot of ALS patients. It is very frustrating for the patient to not be able to communicate to make his needs and wants known. It is even more frustrating to know that there are devices to help the patient, yet not be able to afford them.

It was truly a blessing for me to have been put in touch with Ms. Pugh, because she had a Chattervox Speech Amplifier at her center that could be loaned out to patients, and she graciously made it available to us. It has been such a help to my husband. He would not have been able to communicate this past year if it had not been for the amplifier.

There are so many patients who have great needs for equipment, but not the financial resources to obtain the equipment. It is my hope that agencies such as Carl D. Perkins Rehabilitation Center will always be able to have the necessary funding to be able to provide this much needed service.

Very sincerely yours,

Elizabeth A. Morris

UtahState
UNIVERSITY
UTAH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM
Center for Persons with Disabilities
6588 Old Main Hill • Logan UT 84322-6588

March 21, 2002

Honorable Howard "Buck" McKeon, Chair
21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee
2242 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Patsy Mink, Ranking Democrat
21st Century Competitiveness subcommittee
2210 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable McKeon and Honorable Mink,

Re: Assistive Technology Oversight Hearing on March 21, 2002

I would like to thank both of you for sponsoring the assistive technology oversight hearing on March 21. Assistive technology is a great equalizer for people with disabilities. It enables people to be independent in home, school, recreation, work and community environments. The assistive technology act programs have had a tremendous impact on the lives of people with disabilities and their families. I am very pleased that you are willing to make the time to discuss the successes of these programs over the past 12 years. We also hope that the hearing will be a forum for discussing the challenges that remain in the provision of assistive technology devices and services.

In Utah, we recognize that the needs of every state are different. Each state has been given the latitude to develop a consumer responsive program. I have enclosed a document that describes the success and impact of the assistive technology act funds in our state. I have also described what will be lost if federal funding for this program is eliminated. As you may recall, last summer, your colleagues in the House, Mr. Hansen, Mr. Cannon, and Mr. Matheson signed a letter urging your subcommittee to hold this hearing. They recognize the tremendous impact of this program on the lives of Utahns with disabilities.

Thank you again for your attention to the ever-pressing issue of independence for people with disabilities. On behalf of all Utahns with disabilities, their families, and those who provide services to them, I thank you for your leadership in discussing this important topic. If you have additional questions regarding the impact of the assistive technology act in Utah or in other states, please call me at (435) 797-3886 or e-mail me at meblair@cc.usu.edu.

Sincerely,

Marty Blair
Martin Blair, Director

Telephone: (435) 797-3824 • FAX: (435) 797-2355 • E-Mail: sharon@cpd2.usu.edu

Assistive Technology Act of 1998 Program in Utah

UTAH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM
at
UtahState
UNIVERSITY

Year Funded: 1989

What UATP Does that Others Don't Do

- Provides an interagency, collaborative infrastructure to develop assistive technology policy that is beneficial to Utahns with disabilities and their families.
- Provides interagency, statewide, consumer-focused training on assistive technology to consumers and service providers, with particular focus on underrepresented populations (rural, ethnic minorities, aging).
- Provides the statewide, interagency infrastructure to acquire future state and federal support to assist people with disabilities and their families (see What Utah Stands to Lose below) at a time when federal policy requires greater community access and independence for people with disabilities. In addition, Utah's population, including those with disabilities and those over the age of 60, is growing at one of the highest rates in the country.

Impact on People

Selected Activities	Impact in 2001
Training and technical assistance regarding assistive technology funding, assessment, evaluation and use of technology to enhance independence.	1,140 consumers/family members 2,522 service providers 46 employers
Public awareness and outreach through exhibits and demonstrations.	11,805 individuals
Alternative financing program funded in part by state grant program.	19 loans approved $221,233 total loan amount
Information and referral services specific to assistive technology.	600 individual information requests
Acquisition of assistive technology through independent living program.	320 individuals $900,000 state funds expended

What Utah Stands to Lose

$370,000 in federal funding for the Utah Assistive Technology Program that translates into the benefits listed below:

- Infrastructure to operate a five-year statewide, interagency training program on assistive technology. The first two years of the program generated $176,000 in additional federal funding. The ability to seek these funds in future years will be lost.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Infrastructure to operate the statewide assistive technology low-interest loan program will cease to exist. This endowment account of this program is funded by the Utah State Legislature, private donations, and a federal grant (Title III of the AT Act). Endowment assets total over $900,000. No support from UATP will seriously jeopardize the future viability of this program—endowment principal can't be used for daily operation expenses; interest generated from this endowment is used to fund loan interest buy downs and consumer grants for assistive technology devices and services.
- Infrastructure to apply for future grants under Title III of the AT Act of 1998 (UATP currently has a $500,000 grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR)) will be lost. The Administration increased funding for Title III by $20 million and, at the same time, is eliminating the infrastructure to apply for and administer these programs.
- Infrastructure to assist individuals with disabilities, their families, and service providers in acquiring appropriate assistive technology devices and services through state funded sources will be gone. Over $850,000 has been generated in the past three years.
- Infrastructure to provide in-depth assisitive technology training and technical assistance to service providers, public and private agencies/organizations, and individual consumers will no longer exist. During 2000, this effort was conservatively valued at $100,440.

In his New Freedom Initiative President Bush acknowledges the importance of technology for people with disabilities by calling for federal involvement in assistive technology initiatives.

If you have questions regarding this information, please contact Marty Blair at meblair@cc.usu.edu or by phone at 435-797-3886.

Maine Cite
Maine Consumer Information and Technology Training Exchange
A project supported by the Maine Department of Education, Special Services

March 19, 2002

Congresswoman Patsy Mink
2210 RHOB (Rayburn)
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Representative Mink:

On behalf of MaineCITE (Maine Consumer Information Technology and Training Exchange) I want to thank you and the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness for holding an oversight hearing on the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. This important legislation provides funds to Maine that are vital to our continuing efforts to support access to technology for children and adults with disabilities.

As the entity funded under this Act, MaineCITE leads and coordinates a partnership of ten public and private independent entities that form Maine's statewide assistive technology infrastructure. We know firsthand the need for this federal support. Without it, Maine will lose the infrastructure in place that is effective in helping people across all ages and disabilities access assistive technology devices and services.

Since enactment of this law in 1988, the development of new technologies has literally exploded. The important opportunities that assistive technology offers people with disabilities to live and work independently are extraordinary. Twenty-three states, including Maine, are scheduled for elimination as of September 30, 2002. We strongly urge you to ensure that no states are eliminated from this vital and effective program. We would be pleased to work with you as reauthorization proceeds.

Again, thank you for attention to a program that is vital to people in Maine finding, using and maintaining technology that is effective and appropriate to their changing community, education, employment and independent living needs.

Sincerely,

Kathy Powers

Kathleen Powers
Project Director

Coordinating Center
University of Maine System Network for Education and Technology Services, 46 University Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330
Voice 207/621-3195 TDD 207/621-3482 FAX 207/621-3193

North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Michael F. Easley, Governor

Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

George McCoy, Director

MAILING ADDRESS:

2801 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2801
Courier # 56-20-01

LOCATION:
805 Ruggles Drive
Raleigh, NC 27603

March 18, 2002

Representative Patsy Mink, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
2210 RHOB
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Mink:

I want to thank you for holding the hearing on "Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998." This is a very important hearing to people with disabilities across the nation. As the director of the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the administrating agency for the state tech program, I know how critical it is to North Carolinians with disabilities. Continuation of Assistive Technology federal funding to state programs will make the difference in the ability of people with disabilities to stay competitive in the 21st century.

We offer our assistance to you and your committee as it moves into the reauthorization process of the Assistive Technology Act. Ms. Ricki Hiatt is the director of the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program. She and her staff are ready to assist you. Please feel free to contact her at:

Ms. Ricki Hiatt, Director
North Carolina Assistive Technology Program
1110 Navaho Drive, Suite 101
Raleigh, NC 27609
Phone: 919-850-2787
Fax: 919-850-2792
Email: rhiatt@ncatp.org

Voice (919)733-3364 • TDD (919)733-5924 • Fax (919)733-7968
An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

Please do all you can to ensure that no states are eliminated this year from this essential program for people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

George D. McCoy

George D. McCoy

Cc: Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom
Secretary Lanier Cansler
Glenn Wells
Lynda McDaniel

MAR 11 2002

State of Vermont

AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF AGING & DISABILITIES
VERMONT ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROJECT
103 S. Main St. – Weeks Bldg.
Waterbury, VT 05671-2305
802-241-2620 • 800-750-6355
TTY 802-241-1464

March 11, 2002

Congresswoman Patsy Minks
2210 RHOB (Rayburn)
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congresswoman Patsy Minks:

On March 21st the House Committee on Education and the Workforce will be holding an oversight hearing on the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. This important legislation provides funds to states to support access to technology for people with disabilities. As the Tech Act Project Director for Vermont, I know firsthand about the importance of this federal support.

The Vermont Tech Act project was first established in 1990. Our major areas of focus include efforts that result in laws, regulations, policies or practices that promote consumer responsive programs. Over the past 11 years, our most important accomplishments include passage of an assistive technology equipment lemon law, visitability standards for new homes; support of elder and children's organizations to disseminate information and provide assistive technology services to underserved populations.

Last year the Appropriations Bill funding the Department of Education included an important technical amendment that allowed continued funding for all Tech Act state projects in FY 2002. We need a similar amendment in the FY 2003 bill. Without this amendment, a sunset provision in the statute would require a phase out of this funding for 23 states.

The House oversight hearing on March 21st provides an important opportunity to educate Members about the need for continued federal support for Tech Act projects. Since enactment of this law in 1988, the development of new technologies has literally exploded. The important opportunities that assistive technology offers people with disabilities to live and work independently are extraordinary. Please let Congressman Howard "Buck" McKeon know how much people with disabilities in Vermont appreciated his support for last year's amendment and his willingness to conduct this hearing.

On behalf of Vermonters with disabilities, thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Julie Tucker

Julie Tucker, Director
Vermont Assistive Technology Project

AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

Advocacy and Independent Living • Assistive Technology Project • Department of Aging & Disabilities
Blind and Visually Impaired • Licensing and Protection • Vocational Rehabilitation

IPAT

INTERAGENCY PROGRAM FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY
Judie Lee, Director
P.O. Box 743 • Cavalier, ND 58220
(701) 265-4807 Voice/TDD • (701) 265-3150 Fax
jlee@polarcomm.com

com 500
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2210259/
8385
T/C

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To: Representative Patsy Mink, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Education and the Workforce
FAX: 202-225-4987

From: Judie Lee, Director
Interagency Program for Assistive Technology
North Dakota

Date: March 18, 2002

Thank you for holding the "Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998" hearing. The Assistive Technology Program (IPAT) in North Dakota has made selecting, obtaining, and using AT possible for thousands of people in North Dakota. The State AT projects across the nation provide critical support and resources to each other. North Dakota would loose if any of the states were eliminated. As work proceeds on reauthorization, please contact us for any assistance we can offer.

A program of North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Human Services. An equal opportunity employer.

The TRAID Project
Technology Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities

Richard Warrender
State Advocate

Deborah V. Buck
Project Manager

March 19, 2002

Rep. Patsy Mink, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness

Dear Representative Mink:

The New York Tech Act Project, TRAID, would like to thank you for your efforts in making the oversight hearing on the Assistive Technology Act possible. TRAID has been funded since 1990, and during this period the project has assisted over 100,000 persons with disabilities to identify and acquire assistive devices and services that have greatly benefitted their quality of life. At the state level, the project has been effective in developing policies and procedures that have increased access to assistive technology for persons with disabilities.

Although much progress has been made by TRAID and the other state Tech Act funded projects there is still much to be done. Tech Act Projects are needed more than ever to assist the growing number of persons over age 65 to acquire assistive technology to maintain independence, to provide technical assistance to schools and businesses to maximize assistive technology use to ensure greater productivity, and to help close the digital divide by assuring that persons with disabilities have the right tools to access information technology.

As one of the 23 states slated for elimination as of September 30, 2002, New York's TRAID Project is very aware of the negative impact this loss of funding will have on the disability community. New York's Project staff are prepared to work with you as re-authorization proceeds, and again, thank you for your commitment to continue a very important program.

Sincerely,

Richard Warrender

Richard Warrender
State Advocate

A Federally Funded Project of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR)

NYS Office of Advocate for Persons with Disabilities, One Empire State Plaza, Suite 1001, Albany, NY 12223-1150
800-522-4369 (voice and TTY) **(518) 474-2825 (voice only)** **(518) 473-6005 (fax only)**
800-943-2323 (BBS)

MISSOURI ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY COUNCIL
4731 South Cochise, Suite 114 Independence, MO 64055-6975 matpmo@swbell.net
816 / 373-5193 (Voice) 816 / 373-9315 (TTY) 816 / 373-9314 (Fax)
Established by state statute to increase access to assistive technology for Missourians with disabilities.

Bob Holden
Governor

Sharon LaRoussa
Chairperson

Diane Golden, Ph.D.
Director

Services
Policy Advocacy
Legislative Listserv
Technical Assistance
Training
Information Dissemination

Programs

Power Up Conference
800/647-8557 (voice)
800/647-8558 (tty)
- statewide assistive technology conference and exposition

Telecommunication Access Program (TAP)
800/647-8557 (voice)
800/647-8558 (tty)
for Telephone
adaptive telephone equipment distribution
for Internet
adaptive computer-based equipment distribution

Kids Assistive Technology (KAT)
866/850-3379 (voice)
800/647-8558 (tty)
- last resort funding for children

Swap 'N Shop
866/850-3379 (voice)
800/647-8558 (tty)
- buy, sell, or donate used adaptive equipment

Show-Me Loans
866/850-3379 (voice)
800/647-8558 (tty)
- low interest financing for assistive technology

Equipment Technology Consortium (ETC)
800/881-8652 (voice)
800/647-8558 (tty)
- short-term adaptive equipment loan

March 20, 2002

The Honorable Patsy Mink
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Mink:

The Missouri Assistive Technology Council, along with the undersigned Missouri disability organizations, individuals with disabilities, family members and advocates would like to thank you for holding a hearing on the Assistive Technology Act. We urge you to maintain federal funding for state assistive technology programs to ensure assistive technology access for individuals of all ages with all disabilities.

Without continued funding for Missouri Assistive Technology, this state would lose a critical infrastructure that supports a number of programs:
* School districts would not be able to access equipment for short term loans to help students with disabilities achieve learning goals;
* Individuals with hearing disabilities would not have access to adaptive telephone equipment needed to live independently;
* Consumers would not have access to recycled or used equipment which can mean the difference between affordable and not;
* State policy makers would lose technology access expertise that helps avoid expenditure of funds on inaccessible devices and systems;
* Children would not have access to specialized funding to provide home modifications needed to avoid out-of home placements; and
* Consumers would not have access to low interest loans to support independent living and basic mobility and communication needs.

Again we thank you for holding this important hearing. Please let us know if we can provide you with any information that might assist in the reauthorization of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Sharon La Roussa

Sharon LaRoussa
Chairperson

Affiliated with the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Governor's Council on Disability

Supporting Missouri Disability Organizations, Consumers & Advocates

Paraquad Independent Living Center, St. Louis
The Whole Person Independent Living Center, Kansas City
Warrensburg Independent Living Service, Warrensburg
Ozark Independent Living Center, West Plains
Living Independently for Everyone Center, Farmington
Services for Independent Living, Columbia
Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living, St. Joseph
SEMO Alliance for Disability Independence, Cape Girardeau
Access II Independent Living Center, Gallatin
On My Own Independent Living Center, Nevada
Bootheel Area Independent Living Services, Kennett
Disabled Citizens Alliance for Independence, Viburnum
Rural Advocates for Independent Living, Kirksville
Northeast Independent Living Services, Hannibal
Delta Center for Independent Living, St. Charles
Southwest Center for Independent Living, Springfield
Independent Living Center of Southeast Missouri, Poplar Bluff
Independent Living Resource Center, Jefferson City
Tri-County Center for Independent Living, Rolla
Missouri Association of Centers for Independent Living
Missouri Council of the Blind
National Federation of the Blind of Missouri
Northeast Missouri Council of the Blind
Missouri Self Help for Hard of Hearing
Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities
Gateway Regional Developmental Disability Council, St. Louis
Metropolitan Council on Developmental Disabilities, Kansas City
Disability Connections Regional DD Council, Springfield
Planning and Coordinating Council for DD, Kirksville
Region I Council on Developmental Disabilities, Albany
UCP of Northwest Missouri
ALS Association, Keith Worthington Chapter
National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Gateway Area Chapter
Children's Benefits Services for Families
The Helping Hand of Goodwill Industries
Mary Secora, Show-Me Technology, Columbia
Kristal Berkbigler-Friese, AT Specialist, Cape Girardeau
Christy Welliver, Mayor's Disability Commission, Columbia
Bill Carnagey, Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield
Candace Hawkins, Disability Advocate
Steve Baker, Disability Advocate
Charlott Glowacki, Disability Advocate
Cheri Coffelt, Disability Advocate
Dana McDaniel - Consumer Advocate

DEPARTMENT OF
REHABILITATION
Employment, Independence & Equality

Gray Davis, Governor

State of California
Health and Human Services Agency

Assistive Technology Section
2000 Evergreen Street
Sacramento, CA 95815
(916) 263-8678
(916) 263-8683 Fax
(916) 263-8685 TTY

Representative Buck McKeon, Chair
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
Committee on Education and the Workforce
House of Representatives
Rayburn Building, #2242
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 18, 2002

Dear Representative McKeon:

Thank you for chairing the subcommittee hearings on continued funding for the Assistive Technology Act of 1998.

Enclosed you will find a fact sheet regarding the accomplishments of California Assistive Technology Systems (CATS). Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 263-8686.

Sincerely Yours,

William Campagna
Project Director
California Assistive Technology Systems

Enclosure

DEPARTMENT OF
REHABILITATION
Employment, Independence & Equality

Gray Davis, Governor

State of California
Health and Human Services Agency

Assistive Technology Section
2000 Evergreen Street
Sacramento, CA 95815

Assistive Technology Act of 1998 Program in California

CALIFORNIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

Year Funded: 1993
Lead Agency: California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)

What CATS Does that Others Don't Do

- Provides an interagency, collaborative infrastructure to develop and expand a statewide system of Assistive Technology information and referral, outreach, advocacy, and systems change beneficial to Californians with disabilities and their families.
- Provides interagency, statewide, consumer-focused outreach on assistive technology to consumers and service providers, with particular focus on unserved and underserved populations (rural, ethnic minorities, aging).
- Provides leadership and active participation in California's ADA Interagency Task Force to improve AT services and access by people with disabilities and their families at a time when federal policy requires greater community access and independence for people with disabilities. The ADA Interagency task force has worked to improve accessibility of state owned facilities with representation from the Department of Rehabilitation, Department of Information Technology, Department of General Services, Division of the State Architect, Department of Fair Employment and Housing, and the State Personnel Board. California appropriated $60 million to improve the accessibility of state owned facilities.
- Provides for active participation on the state's Long Term Care Council with representation from California Department of Aging, Department of Rehabilitation, Department of Health Services, Department of Developmental Services, Department of Social Services, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health Services, Office of state Health policy Development, Housing and Community Development and the Department of Transportation.
- Provides for the development of interagency Memoranda of Understanding with California Department of Aging, Division of State architect and Victims of Crime Program (State Board of Control Agency) to assure collaboration of efforts and policy development.

Impact on People

Selected Activities	Impact in 2001
Technical Assistance & Training regarding assistive technology funding, assessment, evaluation and use of technology to enhance independence.	3004 individuals.
Public awareness and outreach through exhibits and demonstrations.	3800 individuals.
Systems Change within California: increased funding within state to provide for AT.	$3.2 million augmentation in Governor's budget for AT advocates housed throughout state.
Establishment of Assistive Technology Advisory Committee: to advise the DOR Director on AT issues for DOR consumers and systems change recommendations for state policies and programs.	115,223 consumers of the DOR.
AT News Service: published twice monthly, the AT Journal, originally published in print, is now web – based.	3400 disseminated to consumers and family members. 9700 distributed to staff and service providers.
AT Network Website: provides connections to local, state, and national resources as well.	476,440 hits on website and growing daily.
Provides toll free number for Information and Referral.	3536 phone calls to statewide toll free phone number.

What California Stands to Lose

In his New Freedom Initiative President Bush acknowledges the importance of technology for people with disabilities by calling for federal involvement in assistive technology initiatives.

California will lose $657,838 in federal funding for the California Assistive Technology System (CATS) Program that translates into the benefits listed below:

- Ongoing outreach, evaluation and technical assistance to broaden access to Assistive Technology to unserved and underserved Californians.
- Infrastructure to continue AT News Service to provide ongoing attention to AT advancement, issues, and systems change.
- Infrastructure to apply for future grants under Title III (Alternative Financing Program) of the AT Act of 1998. The Administration increased funding for Title III by $20 million and, at the same time, is eliminating the infrastructure to apply for and administer these programs.
- Infrastructure to provide in-depth assisitive technology training and technical assistance to service providers, public and private agencies/organizations, and individual consumers will no longer exist.

If you have questions regarding this information, please contact William Campagna at wcampagn@dor.ca.gov or by phone at (916) 263-8686.

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STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL OF HAWAI'I (SILCH)
46-369 Haiku Rd., Suite H6
Kaneohe, HI 96744-4262
PH: 808.236.3045, FAX: 808.236.7605
Email: SILCH@silch.org

Monday, March 18, 2002

The Honorable Patsy T. Mink
US House of Representatives
2210 Rayburn House Office Building
Tel: 202.225.4906
Fax:202.225.4987

Dear Representative Mink:

As the Executive Director of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Hawaii, I have appreciated your support of the Assistive Technology Act 1998. I have witnessed first hand how technology has benefited persons with disabilities in Hawaii. I am aware that on March 21st the first oversight hearing on this legislation is being held and it is important to the people I work with to have continued access to assistive technology services.

As a program whose mission is to "promote independent living and the integration of persons with disabilities into the community" I am very aware of the importance of assistive technology in enabling individuals to achieve their goals and insure their basic human rights. We have benefited from this federal legislation by seeing people receive the resources necessary to increase their quality of life. This has given them new found independence. If the Act is not funded we stand to lose vital resources that empower persons for independence and allow them to live and work as vital contributors to our community.

The Tech Act project was first established in Hawaii in 1991. We have made a lot of gains, however we still need loan programs, education, training and additional resources in order to meet the needs of the disability community here in Hawaii.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Doran J. Porter, Executive Director
Statewide Independent Living Council of Hawai'I
46-369 Haiku Rd., Suite H6
Kaneohe, HI 96744-4262
Phone/TDD: (808)236-3045
Cell: (808)372-2085
Fax: (808)236-7605
eMail: SILCH@silch.org

National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 703/519-3800 • Fax: 703/519-3808 • TDD: 703/519-7008 • www.nasdse.org

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Elementary & Special Education

Executive Director
Bill East

March 19, 2002

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
Education and Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Miller:

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), the professional organization representing the state administrators of education programs for children and youth with disabilities in the 50 states and federal jurisdictions.

NASDSE members are pleased that the Education and Workforce's Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness is holding a hearing on the Assistive Technology Act (ATA) of 1998. Our members have been supportive of this legislation that has enabled states to provide technical assistance to individuals with disabilities – including those of school age – who can benefit from having access to assistive technology.

Because of the phase out provisions contained in the law, many existing state assistive technology projects are losing the federal funding that helps keep their programs viable. Congress has refused to extend the program, indeed has refused up until your Committee hearing to even review the program. So the very real successes of this program have not been shared with Members of Congress.

With the expansion in technology that can assist individuals with disabilities to succeed in school and lead vital and productive lives, the assistance provided by the ATA is needed more than ever.

We urge you to support this program and to support legislation that will provide funding for all states to continue the excellent work that began with the first state grants under this program.

Sincerely,

Bill East

Bill East
Executive Director

RECEIVEL
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PAT
PARTNERSHIPS IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

1110 Navaho Drive
Suite 100
Raleigh, North Carolina
27609-7322
(919) 872-2298 Telephone
(919) 872-2294 Fax
e-mail: assist@pat.org

March 18, 2002

Representative Patsy Mink, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
2210 RHOB
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Mink:

I want to thank you for holding the hearing on "Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998." This is a very important hearing to people with disabilities across the nation. As the Executive Director of Partnerships in Assistive Technology, a private non-profit organization, I know how critical it is to North Carolinians with disabilities. Continuation of Assistive Technology federal funding to state programs will make the difference in the ability of people with disabilities to stay competitive in the 21st century.

We offer our assistance to you and your committee as it moves into the reauthorization process of the Assistive Technology Act. Ms. Ricki Hiatt is the director of the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program. She and her staff are ready to assist you. Please feel free to contact her at:

Ms. Ricki Hiatt, Director
North Carolina Assistive Technology Program
1110 Navaho Drive, Suite 101
Raleigh, NC 27609
Phone: 919-850-2787
Fax: 919-850-2792
Email: rhiatt@ncatp.org

Please do all you can to ensure that no states are eliminated this year from this essential program for people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Tony G. Hiatt

Tony G. Hiatt
Executive Director

Increasing knowledge about and access to assistive technology for North Carolinians with disabilities

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
AUDIOLOGY SERVICE

Chatsworth School
222 New Avenue
Reisterstown, Maryland 21136

Tel: (410) 887-1107
FAX: (410)526-9263

Memorandum

TO: Representative Buck McKeon, Rep. John Bochner, Rep. Patsy Mink

FROM: Eloise F. Brown

RE: Assistive Technology Act

DATE: 03/19/02

Thank you for holding the hearing on 03/21/02 on the Assistive Technology Act. Renewal of this Act is critical for the success of our students with disabilities.

I provide assistive listening devices to students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. This equipment allows them to participate in regular education much of the time.

I ask you to support the amendment that will extend this valuable program. Please feel free to contact me.

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P. MINK DC OFFICE
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To Tim

CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING OF SOUTH FLORIDA

March 19, 2002

The Honorable Buck McKeon
US House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re. Assistive Technology Act

FAX # 202 226-0683

Dear Senator McKeon:

We need an extension on the Assistive Technology amendment. It is vital that persons with disabilities have the equipment. Approximately 23 states are now in danger of losing funding for Assistive technology this year. We are counting on your help to make sure this does not happen.

Should you require our help now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please visit us on our web site at www.soflacil.org.

Respectfully yours,

Damian Gregory/Jackie Anderson
Systems Advocates

cc: The Honorable John Boehner (202) 225 0704
The Honorable Patsy Mink (202) 225 4987

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CIL of South Florida
501 NE First Avenue
Miami, Florida 33132

Voice/TDD 305-379-6650
Fax 305-379-6667
Toll-free 800 854-7561

CIL of South Florida is funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Social Security Administration, Florida Department of Education, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund, Training and Employment Council of South Florida, Miami-Dade County Offices of Human Services and Economic Development and Alliance for Aging.

TMN

Kenneth Lindheims

Chevellanie Bean (305) 256-2960

Madelie Dufresne

(305) 981-2810

Juan Torres

MARGARET (305) 325-1080

Ismael Martinez Brito

(305)-448-3115

Joel ALVARES

305 412 1982.

Katty Strong

(305) 235-0981

Frederick J. Uy

Milagros C. Uy

Clarice McCombs - (305 969-0155)

James K. Romig HOME - (305) 372-2873

Phyllis Sheffield

354-7234

Lucille Slaughter

751-4948

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Suriel Carlos

Devan Chesky 8919694
Norren

Zakiya Pough 305-620-4938
Denroy Fortune (305) 926-1422
michelle [illegible] 305 627 6626
NAtAKi ANderson 305 756-8205
DAVID DOUGLAS
305-685-3593
Edgar Richarte
Jose Bonilla 305-541-8531
Magdalena Sanders 305-358-9211.
Patrick Hardy
Frank 305-460-2545
Yoleixi RUIZ 305-827-9817
JULIO POStigo
Shayla Fortham
[illegible] 1008
Jose Garza 305-456-52[illegible]

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BRONX
Independent Living
SERVICES

BILS
3525 Decatur Avenue
Bronx, New York 10467
Voice: 718-515-2800
TDD/TTY: 718-515-2803
FAX: 718-515-2844

March 19, 2002

VIA FACSIMILE
(202) 225-4987

Dear Rep. Mink:

As a director of an Independent Living Center and a person with a disability myself, I am writing to urge you and your colleagues to support the Assistive Technology Act. Technological devices have allowed many severely disabled individuals to function more productively in our society, working, studying, writing dissertations, being a parent, tax payers, etc.

Please extend this Assistive Technology Act. Technology has positively changed the lives of an enormous numbers of disabled people. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Barbara Bobbi Linn
Executive Director

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United Way Helps Here

TMN

UCP

United Cerebral Palsy
of New York City

Technology Resource Center
120 East 23rd Street
New York, NY
10010-4519

tel 212 979 9700
tty 212 475 0842
fax 212 260 7469

www.ucpnyc.org

March 20, 2002

Dear Rep. Patsy Mink

Re: Amendment for AT

For many people with disabilities access to assistive technology means being the difference between being able to communicate and not being able to do so. I am writing you to urge your support in enacting an amendment to Title I of the Assistive Technology Act. Without an amendment, vital programs that promote assistive technology and universal design of information technology will be terminated by September 30, 2002 in 23 states. This will continue until programs in all states are terminated.

The Committee on Education and the Workforce has not held oversight hearings on this important legislation in over eight years and I understand the agendas of the Committees are full. So, it is highly unlikely that there will be an opportunity for consideration prior to September 30 of this year. Therefore, I am requesting that the Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Subcommittee include an amendment to extend these vital programs for one year, and oversight hearings on the Assistive Technology Act to consider the consequences of termination.

Please act now to ensure that this avenue to independence and full participation for people with disabilities is not closed to them without any Congressional deliberation.

Sincerely,

Marjorie Bissainthe, Director
NYC Regional TRAID Centers

MB:th

Understanding Disabilities, Creating [illegible]

Southern Maine Parent
Awareness

March 20, 2002

Congresswoman Patsy Mink
2210 RHOB (Rayburn)
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Mink:

On behalf of Southern Maine Parent Awareness I want to thank you and the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness for holding an oversight hearing on the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. This important legislation provides funds to Maine that are vital to our continuing efforts to support access to technology for children and adults with disabilities. As an organization that works closely with Maine's statewide assistive technology project (MaineCITE), currently funded by the AT Act, we know firsthand the need for this federal support. Without the continued support and work of MaineCITE the infrastructure necessary for effective development and use of resources to provide assistive technology devices and services will be diminished greatly.

Since enactment of this law in 1988, the development of new technologies has literally exploded. The important opportunities that assistive technology offers people with disabilities to live and work independently are extraordinary. We strongly urge you to ensure that no states are eliminated from this strong and effective program. Twenty-three states, including Maine, are scheduled for elimination as of September 30, 2002. We offer to work with you as reauthorization proceeds.

Again, thank you for attention to a program that is vital to people in Maine finding, using and maintaining technology that is effective and appropriate to their changing community, education, employment and independent living needs.

Sincerely,

Donna Dwyer

Donna Dwyer
Executive Director

886 Main Street · Suite 303 · Sanford, Maine 04073 · (207) 324-2337 / (207) 324-2338 or 1-800-564-9696
Fax: 324-5621 · Website: somepa.org · Email: support@somepa.org

APPENDIX C - WRITTEN OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER PATSY T. MINK, SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C.

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DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS
EDUCATION TASK FORCE
Co-Chair

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EDUCATION AND THE
WORKFORCE

SUBCOMMITTEES:
21st Century Competitiveness
Ranking Member

Workforce Protection

GOVERNMENT REFORM

SUBCOMMITTEES:
Energy Policy, Natural Resources
and Regulatory Affairs

Technology and Procurement Policy

Patsy T. Mink
Congress of the United States
2nd District, Hawaii

WASHINGTON DC OFFICE:
2210 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1102
Phone: (202) 225-4906
Fax: (202) 225-4987
http://www.house.gov/mink/
[illegible]

HAWAII OFFICE:
5104 Prince Kuhio Federal Building
Honolulu, HI 96850-4974
Phone: (808) 541-1986
Fax: (808) 538-0233

Big Island: 935-3756
Maui: 242-1818
Kauai: 245-1951

STATEMENT BY
CONGRESSWOMAN PATSY T. MINK
Before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
Hearing on Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998

Thursday, March 21, 2002

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

I want to welcome our witnesses, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.

This is the first hearing on this issue in 9 years, and I am pleased that the Subcommittee will have a chance to hear more about the Assistive Technology Act before it sunsets in 2004. I want to thank the Chairman for having this hearing and for his interest. This act makes a significant difference in millions of lives.

54 million Americans have some type of disability, and roughly 34.5 million use assistive devices. Assistive technology helps people with disabilities by expanding their educational opportunities, integrating them into the workforce, and allowing them to participate in community activities.

Assistive technology is any equipment that is used to increase or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. This definition includes a wide array of equipment and services. Accessibility can involve the use of specialized computer keyboards, screen readers, screen enlargers, motorized wheelchairs, speech recognition software, and much more.

In 1988 (P.L. 100–407) and 1994 (P.L. 103–218) Congress identified and responded to the assistive technology needs of individuals with disabilities by enacting legislation to provide grants to states to increase access to assistive technology.

The Assistive Technology Act of 1998 was a continuation of the federal government's commitment to ensuring that everyone has the tools needed to fully participate in our society. The Assistive Technology Act provides grants to states that help them address the assistive technology needs of the physically challenged.

However, the 1998 act contained a dangerous sunset provision. States' funding will be reduced by 50%, then 75%, then entirely cut off. All states will be phased out by 2004. This year alone, 23 states are due to have funds cut off, including many on this Subcommittee (Kentucky, Minnesota, Nebraska, Indiana, Massachusetts, Oregon, Virginia and Wisconsin – Hawaii, Delaware, and Georgia are scheduled to be sunsetted next year)

I have received a letter from Barbara Fischlowitz-Leong from Hawaii that explains the accomplishments of Assistive Technology Act, and I ask that it be entered into the record. I have also received letters from the Statewide Independent Living Council of Hawaii, National Association of State Directors of Special Education, as well as letters from California, North Carolina, Vermont, Kentucky, North Dakota and Missouri. All these letters thank the Chairman for holding this hearing and testify to the importance of the Assistive Technology Act in their states. I ask that these letters be entered into the record as well.

The Assistive Technologies Act has helped many who otherwise would not have access to this technology. It has helped develop an infrastructure at the state level that provides outreach to the disabled. It helps people determine the most appropriate technology, and it has promoted low-cost loans. The act provides assistance to the business community to help employ those with disabilities. Parents and consumers use it to obtain technical assistance and referrals.

Despite the obvious need for continuing this program, the Bush administration has announced its intent to significantly decrease funding for Assistive Technology Act. The administration has decided to allow the sunset provisions in the Assistive Technology Act take their course and slowly end the program.

The administration intends to decrease funding for Title I activities by $8.6 million (from $24.3 million to $15.6 million). Under Title I, the states receive federal grants to conduct outreach programs to assist community-based organizations that provide assistive devices and services, and it helps develop the infrastructure that gives consumers and other partners a place to turn to for information, coordination and help.

The administration wants to reduce funding for Title III programs by $15.2 million, a decrease of over 40 percent ($36.5 million to $21.3 million). These programs allow state governments to help disabled individuals purchase assistive equipment through low interest loans, buy-down program, leases, or any other mechanism approved by the Secretary of Education.

All of these loan programs are being run by the programs set up by Title I of this act. Funding only the loan program, as some have suggested, would undermine the efficiency and the intent of the act. Without the Title I programs, no one would have the expertise to properly administer the loan programs and make sure they get the right loan to the right people.

The Bush Administration has taken a step to address these concerns through its New Freedom Initiative. The President has committed to "significantly increase federal funding for low-interest loans to purchase assistive technology," as well as to fund federal research and development, and public-private partnerships. This is a contradictory message he is sending to those who need assistive technology. He wants to increase the loans available to the disabled, but he wants to get rid of the programs that administer and provide access to the loans.

At a time when the information revolution has dramatically changed our economy and increased our reliance on technology, the federal government must not reduce programs that help individuals who need assistive technology. Studies indicate that increased access to assistive technology could help thousands of people. By using assistive technology:

- 62% of working-age people with disabilities have reduced their dependence on their families;
- 58% reduced their need for paid personal assistance.
- 90% of employed people said that they could work better or faster; and
- 83% reported that they earned more money.

For each federal dollar provided to support the Assistive Technology Act, state governments and nonprofit groups provide additional funding that surpasses the federal funds.

Yet without the federal government's commitment to the program, a doorway to independence will be closed to people with disabilities. Without continued support from Congress, thousands of individuals will not obtain the equipment they need to perform their jobs or even perform routine everyday tasks.

Federal funding for Assistive Technology Act programs is crucial to ensuring millions have access to the resources and technology they need. Federal funding helps fill in gaps in state funding, and it ensures continued services when states are forced to cut their budgets. Without federal funding, states will not be able to pay for the toll-free numbers, referral staff, and assessment expertise. This is no time to undermine these services. The need for this technology is a national priority. It is clear the states need the federal partnership so help people go to school and work. This program is a small investment with a significant impact.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses to learn how Congress can improve the existing program and work to ensure the long-term accessibility of assistive technology. I look forward to working with Chairman McKeon and other members of this Committee to reauthorize the Assistive Technologies Act and preserve the independence and livelihood of so many Americans who have benefitted from the great accomplishments this act has achieved.

Thank you.

APPENDIX D - WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARK SCHULTZ, DIRECTOR, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP, NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Statement of Mark Schultz, Director of the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership

Testimony Before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Hearing on Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998

March 21, 2002

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Mark Schultz. I am the director of the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, one of the 50 states and 6 territories receiving federal funding from Title I of the Tech Act. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about our accomplishments and areas of improvement that we have been able to identify.

Nebraska was one of the first nine states to receive a grant under the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-407) and is now in its thirteenth year of operation. The intended outcomes of the programs created under the Tech Act has been to increase access to, availability of, and funding for assistive technology for individuals with disabilities.

While I am here to share information particular to Nebraska's progress, it is important to note that AT Act Projects across the country have developed a variety of diverse strategies and programs that comprise a national assistive technology infrastructure. The flexibility of the Tech Act has allowed each state to prioritize their assistive technology system needs and uniquely develop strategies to meet those needs as appropriate. While this may make it difficult to evaluate programs on a state to state basis, the bottom line is that more and more of the 50 million individuals with a disability in the United States are getting and using assistive technology to live independently, go to school, work, and participate in their communities than before the Tech Act was created.

The Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership is a collaboration between private, non-profit and governmental agencies and organizations that has resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive program of technology-related services for Nebraskans with disabilities. Partnering agencies provide us with support through grants and contracts to provide public awareness, information and referral services, on-site technical assistance, a mobile assessment and evaluation service, funding coordination, training for their staff, equipment loans and equipment recycling, and funding for assistive technology devices and home modifications. Several agencies also have ATP obtain quotes from contractors and vendors, authorize work to be done, monitor the work, and inspect the completed project.

The total amount of contracts and grants that the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership receives for the implementation of this collaboration is about $850,000 per year. These funds come from the Nebraska Department of Education, Health and Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities, and Economic Development. The federal Tech Act provides $379,533 which comprises about 31% of our total budget.

This partnership has resulted in a move away from the traditional categorical service delivery system to one based on the functional needs of the individual, in this case the assistive technology or home modification needs of the individual with a disability. Individuals can access services through the partnership regardless of their age, disability, or location in the state. Traditionally, individuals came into the system based on the category or type of disability they experienced, their age, or their income. Coordination by the partnership allows for programs to fit the needs of the person without the individual having to worry about fitting into the correct eligibility category.

The resulting partnership is a unique collaboration that redirects existing funds to provide seamless services across program lines, focusing on adapting services and funding to meet the needs of the individual rather than fitting individuals into categorical "boxes." The services provided through this assistive technology partnership has resulted in quantifiable outcomes that demonstrate the success of the Tech Act on a systemic level and a consumer level as more consumers are receiving assistive technology assistance than ever before. During the last three years, non-Tech Act funds that were spent on equipment, and home and worksite modifications, totaled more than $14.9 million. An additional $3.8 million in non-Tech Act funds was spent on assistive technology services such as assessments and technical assistance. The $1.14 million of federal support over the three year period has leveraged more than $18.7 million in funding for assistive technology.

Programs established and combined through this partnership include:

Solutions On Site- SOS is a collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation and ATP. Vocational Rehabilitation Title I evaluations are funded through Solutions On Site for employment-related needs of Vocational Rehabilitation consumers with a disability. This can include work-site modifications, computer equipment, software and hardware adaptations, as well as home modifications necessary to allow a person to get out of their home to get to work. During the last three years $647,247 has been provided for assessment services with $2,400,000 for funding of assistive technology for 1,962 individuals. During this same period of time an additional $600,000 in VR Part B funds were provided for assistive technology solutions for another 300 individuals. While the opportunity to provide for these services existed prior to the Tech Act, there has been an increased understanding of the impact assistive technology can have in employment during the last three years. During that time, referrals for assessments under this program have doubled. Prior to the Tech Act, Vocational Rehabilitation did not track expenditures for devices and related services but statistics from 1996, prior to this initiative, show that for that year, $88,565 was expended for assistive technology for 189 individuals.

This program has led to an additional collaboration with Workforce Development to integrate assistive technology solutions into the One Stop resource centers to increase awareness of the potential of assistive technology to enhance the employability and productivity of persons with disabilities in competitive employment. Partners include 23 Workforce Development One Stop sites, Department of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Assistive Technology Partnership. $75,000 has been provided by the partners in addition to a $25,000 grant from the Nebraska Information Technology Fund to assist in equipment purchases for the sites.

HHS Home and Community Based Waiver
This is actually a collaboration of a number of Health and Human Services programs including the Home and Community Based Waiver, Medically Handicapped Children's Program, Disabled Children's Program, Disabled Persons and Family Support Program, Economic Assistance, Subsidized Adoption, Child Protective Services, and Adult Protective Services. ATP provides assessments and authorizes work to be done as recommended. The program is focused on providing appropriate assistive technology and home modification solutions to help keep an individual with a disability in their home, living independently, and preventing institutionalization.

During the last three years, we have provided assistance to more than 2,000 individuals with disabilities who have received approximately $4 million in funding assistance through this program and another $500,000 leveraged from other resources. We have found that most individuals have more than one type of assistive technology need and that the cost of meeting those needs runs an average of $4,322 per individual. The average Medicaid rate per day in a Nebraska nursing home is $103 per day. Comparing these costs demonstrates that the costs of assistive technology and home modifications can be recaptured in less than two months when institutionalization is prevented. We also know that assisting consumers in identifying appropriate assistive technology solutions reduces the likelihood of abandonment. While national studies find that the rate of abandonment of assistive technology is 30-40%, our follow up surveys indicate an abandonment rate of 4%.

Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services estimates that this program saves them $3 million per year by preventing institutionalization of consumers who can and want to stay in their own homes. These services were not a part of the Medicaid Waiver prior to the Tech Act.

Making Homes Accessible
This is a conditional loan program that provides amounts ranging from $1,000 to $15,000 to help consumers make their homes accessible. This program is made available in cooperation with the Department of Economic Development and local Community Housing Development Organizations utilizing Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund dollars.

Since the inception of this program, 56 individuals have been provided $642,326 in conditional loans to make their homes more accessible. An additional $41,000 was leveraged from other resources. We currently have 12 more individuals in progress for an additional $151,990 in loans. This program did not exist prior to the Tech Act.

Home Choice

This program uses more flexible income and credit history guidelines to help individuals qualify for loans to purchase a home of their own. This single-family mortgage loan program is a collaboration between Fannie Mae and the Nebraska Home of Your Own Coalition (of which the Assistive Technology Partnership is the lead agency) to meet the needs of low and moderate income people who have disabilities or who have family members with disabilities living with them.

During the last three years, the HOYO Coalition has received 224 referrals for assistance in purchasing an accessible home. Twenty-six of those referrals resulted in home purchases. Last year 8 individuals closed on homes with a total value of $565,900. We currently have 8 more individuals approved for loans up to $417,650 and 9 more individuals in the pre-approval process. This program did not exist prior to the Tech Act.

Nebraska Educational Assistive Technology Center

The NEAT Center has been established to provide assistive technology services to all of Nebraska's schools. These services include technical assistance to students and schools, discount purchasing, equipment loan and equipment recycling. The NEAT Center works together with ATP to ensure that appropriate technical assistance and training are available, and that funding resources are coordinated to eliminate duplicate purchases between funding sources. Last year, the NEAT Center provided information, training and support to 5,400 educators, parents and related service providers. More than 600 teachers received training on low-tech accommodations that could be made to support students for successful participation in the regular curriculum.

Nebraska's student information reporting system does not track the number of students using assistive technology. However, we do know that during the last three years $6,000,000 was reimbursed to school districts for assistive technology being used by Special Education students. Ten years ago, the average amount of funds being spent on assistive technology was $500,000 less than the current $2 million per year average. Over the last three years another $1.5 million has been provided to the NEAT Center for training, technical assistance, and assessment services for assistive technology for students.

Cost savings have helped to keep expenditures down as schools who have used the NEAT Center's discount purchasing process have saved $90,000 in discounts through statewide buys. Utilization of loaner devices has resulted in additional savings of more than $80,000 to school districts, and re-distribution of used assistive technology through the NEAT Center has saved schools and families more than $100,000. These services did not exist prior to the Tech Act.

Recycling

This activity occurs across all programs. Equipment in this program is available for use by consumers regardless of the original purchasing source. The impact of recycling is just starting to show up in statistics from the Medicaid Waiver program. The average cost per individual for assistive technology and home modifications increased from the previous year primarily due to higher construction costs for ramps and bathroom modifications. However, for categories such as vehicle modifications, exterior lifts, mobility devices, and other assistive devices, the average cost decreased because recycled equipment is being utilized when available.

More than 60 Vocational Rehabilitation consumers have received recycled computers to assist them in ways that increase their employability: accessing college course notes, bookkeeping, developing graphics for organizations and individuals, improving keyboarding skills, serving as an informal technology consultant to others in their community, job exploration/searches, resume development, and drafting. The recycling of used computers helps to reduce costs for Vocational Rehabilitation for consumers who need computers for job training, self-employment, word processing, school, or independent livings tasks. Estimating the average cost for a new computer at $1,000-$1,500, the cost savings to Vocational Rehabilitation is approximately $60,000-$90,000.

As previously mentioned, schools and families accessing recycled equipment have saved another $100,000.

Areas of Improvement

We have learned much from our experiences over the last twelve years. We know that the current economy is causing havoc with state budgets which also threatens the progress we have made. Reductions in state revenue projections jeopardizes the efforts of Tech Act projects as legislators in Nebraska are looking at cuts in Medicaid and funds available for other programs as a way to resolve budget problems. This environment also makes it highly unlikely that consideration will be given to funding for continuation of Tech Act activities beyond federal funding at the state level.

We know that new legislation recognizing the importance of assistive technology in the lives of persons with disabilities continues to create a need for support to systems and consumers as they look to make informed decisions about policies and purchases of assistive technology. Tech Act Projects have been active in expanding Section 508 compliance to state-based initiatives and are valuable resources for much of the President's New Freedom Initiative. The Olmstead Supreme Court decision will require states to include attention to the role of assistive technology in assuring that individuals who want be active participants in their communities can.

We know that advances in technology and the potential these advances have for persons with disabilities continues to progress at a tremendous pace. The systems we are trying to strengthen often have too few resources to address their primary services let alone stay abreast of these technological advances for potential users who are only a portion of their caseload. And that caseload continues to grow with the aging of our population resulting in more and more people with functional limitations that could be accommodated with assistive technology.

We know that categorical funding and services are a huge barrier to overcome, particularly in small states where coordination across program lines must occur to create efficient and cost-effective services. Assistive technology needs cross categorical program lines but programs in the areas of education, community living, health, and employment are specific to their purpose and do not recognize needs outside their scope of services. Tech Act Projects are uniquely situated to cross those barriers to provide the infrastructure necessary for coordinated approaches that will more effectively assure that more persons with disabilities are getting and using assistive technology.

We know that reduced funding has impacted our ability to develop comprehensive assistive technology systems. Nebraska is now receiving about $500,000 less than we did seven years ago. The reduction in funding has resulted in a decrease in support for consumer involvement through our peer network, demonstration centers that have outdated equipment and that rely on untrained volunteers or that have stopped operation, an inability to participate in multi-state collaborations, and diminished outreach efforts.

What improvements could help?

Remove the uncertainty of continued funding and provide funding at a level that will allow for comprehensive approaches rather than one focus at a time. States need to know that Tech Act Projects can and must be a part of the assistive technology infrastructure. We have been successful in developing and strengthening programs, but implementation requires vigilance and effort that will leave agencies wishing they had left things as they were if support is not available. Who will provide the support and expertise to assist states in implementation and help develop services if no one else will and Tech Act Projects do not exist?

Nebraska has been very successful in tapping into other funding resources to sustain a program of assistive technology. However, I do not wish to leave the impression that we no longer need federal funding. I have already mentioned the impact that a reduction in funding has created for Nebraska. A complete loss of federal funding will leave us without the ability to model the effectiveness of our services and assistive technology solutions for many others who do not fit into the programs we have been able to establish. Federal Tech Act dollars were critical in leveraging the development of the programs I have described. The state resources that we are using are targeted to specific populations, areas of the state, ages, or disability. The Tech Act knows no boundaries which makes it the glue that holds these assorted programs together. Without the federal funding to demonstrate the viability of assistive technology through modeling of services or pilot demonstrations, we will have no way to move beyond our current service delivery system.

Finally, I would like to leave you with a story that demonstrates the success that can be achieved when programs have the strength of Tech Act coordination behind them. Isela Galindo was born three months premature and weighed one pound. Lack of oxygen to her brain caused multiple cranial hemorrhages. Today at age 10, Isela experiences bone development problems, has little control of her hands, and uses a power wheelchair. She lives in Bayard, Nebraska with her parents, Max and Alicia Galindo, and a brother and sister. The Galindo's two bedroom home was small and not built to accommodate a wheelchair. Alicia had to carry her daughter down a hallway, through a bedroom, and then into the small bathroom. The doorway was too narrow for Isela's wheelchair and there was no space to maneuver once inside. Alicia had to lift her daughter in and out of their claw foot bathtub. A back injury made it increasingly difficult for Alicia to lift her daughter as she grew older and heavier. An assessment of the family's needs by the Tech Act program determined that the only solution would be an accessible addition to the home. The family could not believe it would be possible. Thanks to coordinated funding from the Tech Act program, resources were obtained from the Department of Economic Development, Health and Human Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation to provide $18,791 to build an accessible bathroom/bedroom addition. The addition has adequate space to utilize a lift to assist Isela in and out of bed and her wheelchair. Before she had her own room, she slept on the floor in her parent's bedroom because there was not enough room for a lift to to get close enough to any of the beds. The roll in shower with grab bars and a hand held shower make bathing easy and safe. According to one of the agencies involved, " The experience of building the addition has helped the Galindo family plan for Isela's future. The independence Isela has achieved is the first step toward her self-sufficiency as a teenager and an adult." As an additional benefit, Isela now has space in her bedroom for a computer for school assignments. She was able to obtain the computer through the NEAT Center's recycling program.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my formal statement. I'd be happy to answer any questions that Members of the Subcommittee may have. Thank you.

APPENDIX E - WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PAUL RASINSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MARYLAND TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

By PAUL RASINSKI,
Executive Director and Consumer
Maryland Technology Assistance Program

March 21, 2002

TESTIMONY to the:

SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21st CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my thoughts about the state programs funded by the Assistive Technology Act. I want to especially thank you, Mr McKeon and you Mrs. Mink, for your leadership on this issue. I also want to thank our Maryland representative, Mr. Hoyer, for his efforts last year and throughout the years to ensure that the assistive technology projects have continued to be funded.

I think I speak for many of us here today when I say that people with disabilities are very pleased that you have called this hearing to begin an examination of this important program that serves so many Americans with disabilities across the country. It has been almost a decade since the House of Representatives held a hearing on this law. So much has happened over that decade, both in terms of the accomplishments of the state grant programs and in the advances we have seen in technology. Remember that a decade ago, none of us were using e-mail!

As the information age moves us forward with technological innovations in our schools, homes and workplaces, and we connect to the " National Information Infrastructure", it is imperative that all citizens, including those who are elderly and those with disabilities, be included in every way. The Federal government has an important continuing role to play in assuring that this happens. The state grant programs supported by the Tech Act have created a much needed infrastructure within the states to ensure access for people with disabilities. However, the lack of a permanent federal commitment to a state program undermines this crucial infrastructure that has leveraged so many additional funds and created so many effective programs. Without this commitment and the federal leadership, the gains that have been realized will disappear as the states are not in a position to take over the federal role.

Maryland's policies toward electronic information and commerce have placed it in the forefront of the nation in relation to the technological handling of business matters. President Bush's New Freedom Initiative is targeted toward people with disabilities and inclusion of technology into their lives to enable them to pursue full and active careers with greater independence. It is the Tech Act projects that co-ordinate initiatives such as these at the state level, ensuring that people with disabilities are aware of such initiatives and can benefit from them. The 56 Assistive Technology Act Programs are an existing infrastructure of consumer responsive projects that have tremendous capacity to ensure that assistive technology is in the hands of those who need it.

However, even after the tremendous efforts over the last 14 years—all of the awareness training, the information and referral services and the systemic change projects -- there are considerable needs that have yet to be addressed. As technology continues to advance and develop at the explosive rate we have encountered in the last decade, we need to ensure that it does so in a way that is inclusive of people with disabilities and does not create new barriers to our acces . More people are becoming disabled daily and many, many more will realize disabilities as our population ages and as sports, recreation and lifestyles in general become faster and more physically demanding.

Who will the parents of a child who has lived injury free for twelve years and been a successful student turn to if that child has an accident that results in head trauma and is suddenly performing at a first grade level and needs a wheelchair for mobility? Such parents, who we encounter in our project, have no awareness at all of what assistive technology is or what it might do for their child.

Who will a senior citizen turn to when he or she can no longer climb the same set of stairs they negotiated for forty years, or is terrified by a potential fall in the bathtub?

Who will employers turn to for information about telecommuting when they read a resume of an individual on the Internet and realize they have found a genius who could solve all their software problems but the individual can not spend more than a few hours a day out of bed, due to a chronic disability?

The information specialists at Tech Act programs have taken years to become experts and virtual encyclopedias of information about assistive technology devices and services. Many spend hours each day searching for new information and building networks of resources to keep up with technological advances. They share this information regularly with parents, educators, employers, social workers and others who simply don't have the expertise or time to search for this information individually.

There is no other law, program, agency or organization that has a mandate or mission to serve the spectrum of consumers that the Tech Act programs serve -- all ages and all disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act serves adults seeking employment; the IDEA serves children in special education and the Americans with Disabilities Act sets standards for access. Many diseases and conditions have organizations that assist only those who have that particular condition. The Tech Act programs have initiated projects that provide the same level of assistance for infants with birth defects as they do for elderly individuals with disabilities.

In Maryland we have piggybacked services to provide a one-stop shop method to answer the needs of some of our consumers. Using discretionary funds we created a non-profit organization to begin a bulk purchasing program that negotiates discount prices on AT devices and educational software. We combined the services with our TITLE III grant program to offer participants in the loan program the most buying power for their loan money. The loan program participants now come to our program and receive counsel on the best device for their needs, the best price for the device and the best access to funds for its purchase.

The Maryland Technology Assistance Program and its sister Tech Act programs have been extremely innovative in answering the needs of individuals with disabilities. We coordinate with one another as well as Federal, State, community and private agencies and organizations on projects of concern in education, work, home and play. We work closely with the Protection and Advocacy programs funded by Title I of the Tech Act to ensure that those who need individual advocacy and assistance are referred to those important programs.

Maryland's Technology Assistance Program's (MD TAP) Initiatives

Over the course of the past thirteen years, MD TAP has accomplished the following major objectives:

- Successful staffing and marketing of a national toll-free technology information line which has responded to over 15,000 consumer calls, not only from citizens of Maryland, but also from across the U.S. and Canada.
- Training for groups including; parents, educators, employers, health care personnel and case workers of individuals with disabilities on awareness, use, availability and affordability of AT devices and services.
- Initiatives to ensure that motorized wheelchairs will function effectively or be accountable to a "Lemon Law" for assistive technology, and that the Durable Medical Equipment dealers doing business in Maryland will comply with national standards.
- Regional technology demonstration and loan centers in Baltimore City, Frederick and Washington Counties and Salisbury, serving as outreach sites to consumers, educators, employers, health care personnel and case workers, and ensuring that assistive technology expertise is available throughout the state.
- Development of a Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program under the Maryland Relay Service, bringing Maryland in line with 25 other states currently offering this necessary technology to low income individuals with disabilities. This program serves primarily deaf individuals.
- Collaboration and financial support of an innovative leading edge technology for the blind. The National Newsline Service provides the world's first automated daily newspaper reading service utilizing state-of-the-art technologies and existing telephone equipment.
- Maryland Arts Access Inc., a not-for-profit agency, incorporated as a 501-C-3 under funding by MD TAP, to provide consultation and direct services to arts organizations, increasing access to the arts and cultural activities by Maryland citizens and visitors with disabilities.
- The Assistive Technology Loan Program, a fiscal loan program, developed in partnership with First National Bank of Md. (now Allfirst), providing low interest loans to assist persons with disabilities who do not qualify for low-income subsidies, but who require specialized financial services to obtain assistive technology
- A 5-year sub-grant to Maryland Disabilities Law Center totaling over $300,000, provided protection and advocacy to parents, regarding the availability of assistive technology in the public schools and their rights and responsibilities within the educational system. Over 500 individual students have been substantially assisted.
- The Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan Program, created by legislation and a State general fund appropriation of $500,000 in 1999 and awarded federal grants of $500,000 and $1,100,000 in 2000 and 2001, is providing guarantees for loans to purchase assistive technology. MD TAP has contracts with three leading agencies that provide low interest rates to participants, the Program also buys-down rates to make the loans even more affordable.

- Assistive Technology: Loans, Acquisition, Service and Training, Inc. (AT:LAST) another not-for-profit organization created by MD TAP has developed a cooperative purchasing program to aid its members, Maryland School systems and other educational entities, in bulk purchases of educational AT. AT:LAST solicits best price discounts on AT from venders then takes orders from its members who benefit from a mass purchase price even if they buy an individual item. AT:LAST also organizes and provides training on the latest developments in the use of AT in education.

Data on key activities for FY 2001

Guaranteed Loan Program

- ❖ Received over 500 inquiries from potential applicants,

- Reviewed 84 loan applications,
- Approved 50 guaranteed loans totaling over $450,000 in principal,
- Facilitated 4 non-guaranteed loans totaling $34,675 in principal,
- Collected $53,000 in repaid funds,
- Awarded $500,000 from NIDRR federal match,
- Negotiated reduced guarantee requirement to 50%, in effect doubling our funds,
- Provided counseling and referral services,

CO-OP Purchasing Program

- Enlisted 33 manufacturers,
- Listed 449 products,
- Negotiated 2 software licensing plans - 111 titles,
- Arranged 5 membership wide buy plan with manufacturers,
- Coordinated 7 group buying arrangements for AAC devices,
- Produced $600,000 in savings,

Regional Partners - Centers

MD TAP enhances its federal funds by contracting with local volunteer and non-profit organizations to carry out the mission of the Tech Act in the more rural areas of the State. Always fearful that federal funds will terminate, MD TAP is working with these organizations to ensure the continuance of activities related to AT.

Eastern Shore - Holly Foundation - Salisbury, MD
Western MD - AT: LAST - Washington County Hospital
Central MD - Maryland Rehabilitation Center

- Established agreement with local volunteer organizations to man display sites,
- Increased inventory of display, demo and loan devices at each site,
- Developed information materials for distribution,

Web site - www.mdtap.org

Featured:
- Bi-monthly newsletter,
- Training calendar,
- Links to A.T. resources

Systemic Change activity

Medicare's AAC Device Coverage:

Helped develop a provision to allow access to the full range of currently available AAC devices. Medicare beneficiaries will now have additional devices covered and available to them.

MD TAP TAKES ON NEW RESPONSIBILITIES.

On July 26, 1990, President Bush signed P.L. 101-336, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, transportation, State and local government, and telecommunications. Hailed by many as the most sweeping civil rights legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the ADA opened doors for persons with disabilities but at the same time raised many questions regarding the law's implementation and requirements. In response to anticipated needs, in 1991 and again in 1996, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) of the U.S. Department of Education, awarded five-year grants to establish and operate 10 regional Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs). Each DBTAC was charged with providing training, technical assistance, and information to businesses, consumers, and State and local governments seeking clarification on the ADA's provisions and requirements.

Since 1996, TransCen, Inc., a non-profit organization established in 1986, has successfully operated the Region III DBTAC, known as the ADA Information Center for the Mid-Atlantic Region ("the Center"). TransCen, Inc., has served as the Center's lead organization, with services provided collaboratively by six State Coalitions in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. These Coalitions provide information, materials, presentations, and resources to local communities in the Region III States.

A comprehensive plan to build on the TransCen team's significant experience in operating the Region III DBTAC, proposes an organizational structure, activities, and personnel to continue the DBTAC's present work and *to place new, special emphasis on assisting educational entities in providing persons with disabilities with accessible, education-based information technology.*

The project encompasses three overlapping activity areas: information dissemination, training and technical assistance. To ensure that all of the project goals and objectives are met, TransCen, Inc. is expanding the Region III DBTAC to include the six Region III **Assistive Technology Act grantees**. The ATA grantees in, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia have partnered to form the new Mid-Atlantic Accessible Education-Based Information Technology Consortium ("the Consortium").

During the life of the five-year grant, the Consortium is to:
1: Provide technical assistance and training, and disseminate information on legal obligations of educational entities to provide accessible information technology (IT) to students and employees.
2: Provide technical assistance to educational entities to enable them to conduct self-evaluations on the accessibility of their IT.
3: Provide technical assistance, either directly or through referral, on how to make existing IT accessible and to ensure that new IT acquisitions are accessible.
4: Promote best practices by encouraging educational entities to purchase IT consistent with standards issued by the Access Board under Section 508 or universal design principles, regardless of whether they have a legal obligation to do so.
5: Provide information to CILs, Parent Training Information Centers, and Regional Resource Centers on accessible education-based IT.
6: Form regional partnerships among Assistive Technology Act grantees, Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers (RERCs), Office of Special Education Programs' technology grantees, and other educational organizations/agencies to guide, coordinate, and carry out technical assistance activities in each State.

The writing and presentation of this article begins MD TAP's campaign to draw awareness to the effort of the DBTAC to accomplish its goals.
One, we will bring to light the need to become compliant to the laws and standards. Not for the sake of legal action, but for the inclusion of all individuals in educational offerings.
Two, we will help education entities realize their degree of compliance by disseminating material and guidelines for self evaluation.

Three, in the near future, we will begin to demonstrate proper methods of creating more accessible IT through training and technical assistance.

The process will take time and the cooperation of the targeted educational entities but the end result will offer more individuals with disabilities better access to educational IT and create easier navigation of sites for everyone.

Conclusion

In 2004, the Assistive Technology Act is scheduled for reauthorization by Congress. I , and my colleagues in the state programs and many other non-profit organizations around the country, look forward to working with you to develop new ways to support access to technology for people with disabilities. We hope that you will ensure continued support for the programs in the 50 states and territories. We believe that this federal leadership role provides the infrastructure and the seed money that leverages a great range of programs and services that are critical to people with disabilities. For example, all of the Title III loan programs are administered by the Title I state programs. If there were no Title I program infrastructure, there would be no Title III loan programs.

We are most grateful to you for your leadership on behalf of Americans with disabilities who depend on assistive technology for their independence and their full participation in our society. Thank you.

Committee on Education and the Workforce

Witness Disclosure Requirement – "Truth in Testimony"
Required by House Rule XI, Clause 2(g)

Your Name: PAUL RASINSKI		
1. Will you be representing a federal, State, or local government entity? (If the answer is yes please contact the committee).	Yes X	No
2. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) which you have received since October 1, 1999: STATE GRANTS FOR TECHNOLOGY RELATED ASSISTANCE DISABILITY AND BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY CENTERS REGION III (SUBCONTRACT)		
3. Will you be representing an entity other than a government entity?	Yes X	No
4. Other than yourself, please list what entity or entities you will be representing: PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES		
5. Please list any offices or elected positions held and/or briefly describe your representational capacity with each of the entities you listed in response to question 4:		
6. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) received by the entities you listed in response to question 4 since October 1, 1999, including the source and amount of each grant or contract:		
7. Are there parent organizations, subsidiaries, or partnerships to the entities you disclosed in response to question number 4 that you will not be representing? If so, please list:	Yes	No

Signature: Paul Rasinski Date: 3-20-2002

Please attach this sheet to your written testimony.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

APPENDIX F - WRITTEN STATEMENT OF WILLIAM WARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INDEPENDENT EMPOWERMENT CENTER, MANASSAS, VIRGINIA

made before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness

March 19, 2002 at 10:30 am.

Good morning Mr. McKeon and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Bill Ward and I would like to take a few minutes to share with you my experiences on how the Virginia Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority has helped me and others I know get needed assistive technology. In my own case, it was a very much needed newer van that allowed me to continue accessing the community and having a life. Though there is some public transportation available, the buses do not run on weekends and I go places I want and need to by van, affordably.

I feel like I'm getting ahead of myself. My mobility disability, C3-4 complete Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) requires that I use a van to get where I need or want to go. Technical advice from the tech system showed me the benefit of electric lockdown systems. (This expands my options for drivers because it saves time and makes four point strapping tie-downs unnecessary.) When you have modern equipment you can enter and exit your vehicle with ease and want to because it is more effortless. Prior to the newer technology and van, I was relegated to sliding board transfers and a manual wheelchair that had to be disassembled, folded, and placed in the trunk. This kind of effort required a great deal of planning, and picking healthy and strong drivers. This old process required two people and a lot more time; therefore, my day of travel was once in, going to location (be it work or appointment and then back home). A van equipped with a wheelchair lift and electric lockdown for my wheelchair afford me the ease of quick loading and unloading to make it a more pleasant experience and one worthy of doing multiple times a day. I travel a lot on State advocacy issues and as part of my job as Executive Director of the Independence Empowerment Center, Inc.(IEC). My old 1990 van was purchased in 1996 for $6,000, having 80,000 miles, with my family and I paying 100% of the cost. That van now is worn out with over 249,000 miles on it.

The advisory component on what to buy came from the Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS). On more than one occasion, my Center for Independent Living (CIL) has referred participants (people with disabilities that open a file at the Center) and consumers (those people with disabilities who have not opened a file with IEC) to VATS for the proper equipment and they likewise strengthened our thoughts on checking with the Loan Fund.

The Loan Fund Authority has made the application process easier by putting them online and allowing CILs to help participants fill out applications. The newer version of the application makes it easy to apply. Once I located a van in Waynesboro, I consulted VATS and made inquires to banks for funding. This was disheartening, since some local banks were concerned about some participants not having full-time employment, Another issue with banks was their not always understanding the piece or pieces of assistive technology people were applying for. In some instances, a consumer only needed less than $500 to meet their needs, but the bank did

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not make loans for that same amount. This could result in substandard financing alternatives and assured higher interest rates and payments.

The Loan Fund application process was one of the easiest I have experienced.

1) I went to the DRS website and used pick list to go to the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority site.
2) I printed off a copy of the application.
3) An office assistant helped me complete the standard Bank form.
4) The form was mailed to the Loan Authority and Suntrust Bank. Issues about past credit history and past debts were explained and the loan fund understood how essential this assistive technology is to me having a full and productive life.
5) A lower interest rate was offered based on a buy-down, as I understand, and this allowed me to get a better product (newer van than I would have been able to afford without financing).
6) By being able to get the lower rate and a newer vehicle, the new van should last me longer.

Two parts of technology assistance have made my life better. First, the technical advice of the Virginia Assistive Technology System on what my limited resources should purchase that can best benefit me, and the suggestion of looking into a loan from the loan authority. The second piece of concern here is how the Loan Authority made the ideas and needs shown by the tech element, become a reality. One valuable part of both components of a successful assistive technology purchase was the consumer direction and participation along the way. First, I was able to see, touch, and try equipment that is most current through seminars and facilities that bring newer technology from Internet or brochures to reality. Secondly, the loan authority with its more user friendly application and support by email or telephone and CIL cooperation ("no heavy handed or intimidating bank people" as one consumer at our Center said).

In Conclusion, I am thankful for the ability to access and attain modern assistive technology to make life better for me. In addition, it makes it easier for those who provide my care because of a healthy, informed, and funded loan program. Tech Projects provide direct technical assistance to consumers, Independent Living Centers, and service providers on devices and services through their information and referral capacities, as well as critical funding guidance when necessary. This helps support the need of many individuals who may be eligible for loan financing. From where I sit, consumer control is fundamental to the operation of the loan program. Both, Tech projects and AT loan programs are critical to independence and helping consumers acquire needed technology and making informed choices.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment on a program that is working and needed for people with disabilities.

Respectfully,

William N. Ward

Committee on Education and the Workforce

Witness Disclosure Requirement – "Truth in Testimony"
Required by House Rule XI, Clause 2(g)

Your Name: William N. Ward		
1. Will you be representing a federal, State, or local government entity? (If the answer is yes please contact the committee).	Yes	No X
2. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) which you have received since October 1, 1999: I HAVE RECEIVED NO GRANTS. The Company I work for, IEC, has received PART B funds in 1999-$17,000, 2000-$21,500, and 2001-$25,000. These funds are administered by the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) with Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) providing oversight. IEC must meet the constraints outlined in the Grant. In 1999 and 2000, the focus was on people in Nursing homes. This current year Grant requires quarterly milestones on the disability needs assurtained by a Community Action Specialist position and a group of local people with disabilities.		
3. Will you be representing an entity other than a government entity?	Yes X	No
4. Other than yourself, please list what entity or entities you will be representing: -----The Independence Empowerment Center (IEC),local Center for Independent Living (CIL), where I work as Executive Director. -----All People with Disabilities,who can not be here, today.		
6. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) received by the entities you listed in response to question 4 since October 1, 1999, including the source and amount of each grant or contract: See no. 2 above.		
7. Are there parent organizations, subsidiaries, or partnerships to the entities you disclosed in response to question number 4 that you will not be representing? If so, please list:	Yes	No X

Signature: ______________________ Date ______________________

Please attach this sheet to your written testimony

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APPENDIX G - WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CAROL NOVAK, PARENT, TAMPA, FLORIDA

Statement of Carol Novak, Parent

Testimony Before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Hearing on "Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998"

March 21, 2002

Chairman McKeon and members of the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing on the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. Research data and statistics are useful in assessing the outcome of public policy. But, the real experts in assessing outcomes are the people with disabilities who use or need Assistive Technology (AT).

My son, Jonathan, and I have lived with his cerebral palsy for almost 26 years now. During those years we have acquired extensive knowledge of and experience with assistive technology and federal assistive technology programs. A variety of assistive technologies enable Jonathan to live a more independent and productive life. He uses a power wheelchair for mobility, an accessible van for transportation, an augmentative communication device for communication, word prediction software for computer access, and a ceiling track lift and transfer system for activities of daily living. He also uses several low-tech assistive technologies, such as a plate guard that enables him to eat independently. **It is important to note that the combined cost of all of these technologies, which will last for years, is less than the cost of one year in a nursing home.**

The main intent of the original act passed in 1988 was to provide grants to States for the purpose of increasing awareness of assistive technology. That goal has been accomplished, and State AT Act projects contributed to this achievement. Today, there are a number of web sites that serve as clearinghouses of information on assistive technology. Mainstream resources are now disseminating information on AT: Business Week Online has run a regular Assistive Technology column for several years, AARP's web site features a section on "Tools and Gadgets for Independent Living," many vendors – from Sunrise Medical to Maxi-Aids - have web sites, and even my hometown newspaper publishes occasional articles about assistive technologies. Professional associations like RESNA offer conferences and training on assistive technology. Industry, in order to achieve compliance with Section 508 of the Rehab Act, is addressing disability access in mainstream electronic and information technologies. It's no longer necessary or appropriate for Federal programs to fund what amounts to assistive technology product marketing efforts. Industry and entrepreneurs are now engaged in the arena of assistive technology, and the private sector is traditionally more efficient than the public sector in effecting change.

Reports by the National Council on Disability and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research have established that the primary reason people with disabilities don't have the assistive technology they need is lack of funding. The existence of a widespread need for assistive technology is affirmed in the nation's strategic public health plan, Healthy People 2010, by Goal 6-11, which is to "Reduce the proportion of people with disabilities who report not having the assistive devices and technology needed."

The principal funding sources for assistive technology are Vocational Rehabilitation, VA, Medicaid, and school systems when an IDEA student's IEP calls for AT. However, these programs serve narrowly defined populations and many people with disabilities who can benefit from Assistive Technology are not eligible for any of them. Even when a person is eligible for one of these programs, it is often difficult to get funding approval for the purchase of Assistive Technology – challenging battles and long waiting periods are typical. For this reason, I support continued funding to the State Protection and Advocacy Offices to advocate for people's assistive technology needs.

In the 21st Century, "we need to make capital investments in people, rather than 'maintaining' them in lifelong dependence on the government" as Newt Gingrich aptly states in "The Age of Transitions." In other words, we should be funding **people**, rather than programs. In order to reduce the major barrier to the acquisition of assistive technology - the lack of funding, the resources available for assistive technology programs should be directed:

1) to expanding funding for the alternative financing programs authorized in Title III and supported by President Bush in his New Freedom Initiative,
2) to promoting assistive technology recycling efforts,
3) to funding expert assessments to ensure the acquisition of appropriate technology, and
4) to providing consumer training for the more sophisticated devices.

Additional information regarding the four recommendations in the preceding paragraph:

1) Sixteen states now have alternative financing programs funded under Title III of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. A number of other states also have alternative financing programs funded through other means.

2) There are a variety of recycling efforts across the nation. One of the most outstanding is located in Atlanta, Georgia. Friends of Disabled Adults and Children, FODAC, is a faith-based non-profit that accepts donations of used wheelchairs and other durable medical equipment, computers, and other devices. After they refurbish these technologies with volunteer labor and donations, the devices are given to anyone who needs them. FODAC also provides affordable vehicle modifications. The estimated retail value of all the medical equipment that FODAC has given away now totals over $30 million and it is their belief that they have saved taxpayers over $15 million. Unfortunately, FODAC constantly struggles to raise adequate operating capital.

3) Expert assessments help to ensure that the most appropriate assistive technology is prescribed for the individual. Rehabilitation professionals assess the individual's abilities, the task(s) to be performed, the environment where the device will be utilized, and recommend the most appropriate device. Expert assessments help reduce the likelihood that the technology will be abandoned, thereby making the most economical use of funding resources.

4) Often, when a funding source can be found to pay for a sophisticated assistive device, such as Jonathan's augmentative communication device, no funding is available for training on the use of that device. Without training, the user is not likely to maximize the technology's potential and, in many cases, the technology ends up being abandoned. The result is the waste of that person's abilities and of precious funds.

Federal assistive technology programs must be responsive to the people they are meant to serve, like Jonathan, and they must be responsible to taxpayers. This is essential to the achievement of good public policy because consumers' need for assistive technology is the reason these programs exist and because it is taxpayers' money that funds these programs. We can empower people with disabilities by making funding for the purchase of assistive technology directly available to them. Increasing their independence and participation through assistive technology will be both responsive and responsible.

Committee on Education and the Workforce

Witness Disclosure Requirement – "Truth in Testimony"
Required by House Rule XI, Clause 2(g)

Your Name: Carol Novak		
1. Will you be representing a federal, State, or local government entity? (If the answer is yes please contact the committee).	Yes	No X
2. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) which you have received since October 1, 1999: None		
3. Will you be representing an entity other than a government entity?	Yes	No X
4. Other than yourself, please list what entity or entities you will be representing: None		
5. Please list any offices or elected positions held and/or briefly describe your representational capacity with each of the entities you listed in response to question 4: N/A		
6. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) received by the entities you listed in response to question 4 since October 1, 1999, including the source and amount of each grant or contract: N/A		
7. Are there parent organizations, subsidiaries, or partnerships to the entities you disclosed in response to question number 4 that you will not be representing? If so, please list:	Yes	No X

Signature: Carol Novak Date: 3-15-02

Please attach this sheet to your written testimony.

APPENDIX H - WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY GUS ESTRELLA, SENIOR POLICY ADVOCATE, UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY ASSOCIATIONS, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Testimony of
Gus Estrella
Senior Policy Advocate
United Cerebral Palsy Associations

On
State Assistive Technology Programs

Before the
Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Twenty-first Century Competitiveness
United States House of Representatives

March 21, 2002

Chairman McKeon, Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Gus Estrella and I am senior policy advocate for the United Cerebral Palsy Associations. First, I want to thank you for holding this hearing on a program that is vital for many people with disabilities. The Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (ATA) provides funding for assistive technology programs in 46 states and territories. This program allows persons with disabilities, such as myself, to continue to receive the technologies that allow them to participate in school, work, and community life.

I would like to talk to you about the Assistive Technology Act and how important and vital it is to people with disabilities, like myself. I, personally, use assistive technologies from the second I get out of bed to the second I put my head on my pillow at night. Assistive technology comes in many shapes and forms to fit the needs of an individual with a severe disability. My assistive technology consists of the following items:

1.) A manual wheelchair that I use to get around my apartment, pushing myself around by using my left foot. This is pretty low tech, but it gets the job done.

2.) I also have a motorized wheelchair that gives me the freedom to go to work, to Capitol Hill visits, to meetings, shopping, and basically, anything else my heart desires. With my motorized wheelchair, I have no limits as to where I can go. If my motorized chair were taken away, it would be like taking away my self-respect that has taken years to develop and nurture and made me the unique individual that I am today.

3.) Next is my augmentative communication device that I use to communicate with anybody. The augmentative communications devise gives me a chance to express my thoughts and desires. This augmentative communication device has opened many doors for me that would not otherwise have opened. Without it, I would not be able to maintain my employment and contribute to society as a full citizen.

At my office, my productivity depends on how well my workstation is setup with the appropriate assistive technology that interfaces with everyday technologies. For example, I'm able to connect my augmentative communication device with my computer which allows me, a person with a severe disability, to operate the computer and even type at a reasonable rate. Otherwise, without this technological marriage, I would most likely be typing at a rate that would be considered to be slower than the turtle in *The Turtle and the Hare*.

Outside the office, I'm able to lead a fairly "normal" life, which includes being married. My wife has a disability, as well. Between the two of us, we use assistive technology on a regular basis in our everyday life. Our latest purchase of assistive technology was possible through a loan my wife and I received through the Maryland assistive technology act project, a project that is funded by the state grants that are the subject of this hearing. With the loan, we were able to purchase lock down devices for our van, making it easier and safer to get around town. With the lock down device, we can be ready to hit the road of life in three minutes versus 25 minutes it used to take prior to getting these devices.

Clearly, assistive technology can make a big difference in the lives of people with severe disabilities, like myself, in ways that cannot really be measured. For this very reason, President Bush in his New Freedom Inititiative has underscored the need for assistive technology to allow people with disabilities to fully participate in the economic and social mainstream of American life. One of the key components of the New Freedom Initiatives is "Increasing Access to Assistive and Universally Designed Technologies." To increase access, however, we must also fund the state grants that support the infrastructure to bring the individuals with disabilities and the technology together.

Federal leadership is needed and must be sustained to encourage state and private investment. Today, many states have serious budget shortfalls. The state grants provide the infrastructure to bring together the people who need the assistive technology, information about what technology is available and information about funding to purchase that technology. If the federal role ceases, this vital infrastructure will end and the web will be broken.

The state grant program promotes access to assistive technology for people with disabilities and universal design of information technology so that people with disabilities will not be left out of the digital revolution. Each funded project in this national infrastructure for improving access to assistive technology (AT) and accessible information technology reflects the needs and characteristics of its particular state or territory, yet they all share the same core functions, including: technical assistance, information and referral, and training.

The ATA supports the States in sustaining and strengthening their capacity to address the assistive technology needs of individuals with disabilities; focuses investment in technology across Federal agencies and departments that could benefit individuals with disabilities; and finds micro-loan programs to provide assistance to individuals who desire to purchase assistive technology devices or services.

State Assistive Technology Programs are designed to assist persons with disabilities with gaining employment by providing them with the devices and services they need to participate in the workforce.

Twenty-three states are at risk of losing their funding this year: Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont. Virginia, and Wisconsin. As a practical matter, however, if half the states lost their funding, this entire program would be in extreme jeopardy of extinction.

Strong federal leadership is essential in order to close the growing digital divide between people with and without disabilities. The existing national network of State AT projects serves as a core program that leverages additional state and private dollars and ensures exchange of information about successful programs among the states. Without the federal legislation and funding, states could not adequately address the needs of people with disabilities in relation to assistive technology and accessible information technology and there would be no national infrastructure for these activities.

The core work of Sate AT Programs is to provide technical assistance to state policy makers and improve state policies and programs in order to increase access to assistive and information technologies. Examples of this critical work are:

- Development of aging and assistive technology initiatives for those over age 60;
- Development and implementation of new policies designed to ensure access to AT in the One-Stop Employment Centers as established by the Workforce Investment Act;
- Development or expansion of Medical Assistance programs to include the provision of medically necessary AT;
- Coordination among state entities regarding the provision of AT; and,
- Adoption of state information technology access standard to guide procurement and development of information technology products.

State AT Programs also ***leverage non-federal contributions*** to initiate, expand, and maintain programs that provide assistive technology devices and services. Examples of these programs include:

- Low interest cash loan programs to assist persons with disabilities to borrow money to purchase assistive technology (including computers and van modifications);
- Short-term assistive technology equipment loan programs that allow equipment to be tried prior to purchase ensuring better buying decisions; and,
- Training and technical assistance activities such as electronic bulletin boards, assistive technology newsletters, and pre-service training programs.

State Assistive Technology programs provide access to assistive technology and services designed to increase independence.

- An estimated 15.6 million people in the US either use some type of specialized assistive technology or have reported they would benefit if they did use assistive technology (Technology and Disability, vol 6, pp. 17-28, 1997).
- The unemployment rate is 73.9% for people with severe disabilities between the ages of 21 and 64 (1994 figures), (Presidents Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Basic Facts. [http://ww v.pcepd.gov/pubs/ek97/facts.htm]).
- The overall unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 47.7% compared to the general population unemployment rate of 17.9 (1994 figures), (Presidents Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Basic Facts. [http://www.pcepd.gov/pubs/ek97/facts.htm]).
- Persons with disabilities have lower employment rates than persons without disabilities, thus programs, such as the ATA, which assist persons with disabilities in gaining employment should continue to receive funding.
- People with a disability, ages 16-64 years, are more likely to receive means-tested income (primarily from SSI) and less likely to receive earned income or asset income (e.g. from investments), compared to people with no disability (Chartbook on Work and Disability in the United States, 1998, NIDRR).

The ATA contains phase-out provisions that would have ceased funding state assistive technology programs beginning on October 2001. The funding for state assistive technology programs was secured for FY 2002. Last year, Congress waived the sunset provision in ATA, which would have required a decrease in the funding for the state grant programs in Title I of the Assistive Technology Act. ATA received $60,884,000 in FY 2002. UCP strongly supported this extension and appeals to this committee to support a more permanent extension of this vital program. In only six months, we are in danger of losing this vital assistive technology infrastructure in almost half the states unless something is done. Please support the state grants for assistive technology.

United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc. ("UCP") is a Washington D.C.-based not-for-profit corporation incorporated in 1948. The mission of UCP is to advance the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities, through its commitment to the principles of independence, inclusion and self-determination. UCP is the leading source of information on cerebral palsy and is a pivotal advocate for the rights of all people with disabilities. UCP and its nationwide network of over 100 affiliates in 40 states strive to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in every facet of society.

APPENDIX I - WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY RALPH W. MOHNEY, JR., SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, RETURN-TO-WORK SERVICES, UNUMPROVIDENT CORPORATION

STATEMENT FROM

UnumProvident Corporation

ON

"Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998"

A HEARING OF THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS

OF THE

HOUSE EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

COMMITTEE

MARCH 21, 2002

Submitted by:
Ralph W. Mohney, Jr.
Senior Vice President,
Return-to-Work Services
UnumProvident Corporation
April 3, 2002

On behalf of UnumProvident Corporation (UnumProvident) we are pleased to submit for the record, the following testimony.

Often when considering the impact of the Assistive Technology Act, the focus is on individuals with catastrophic and permanent disability. Assistive technology is critical to creating a capacity in such people to move from dependence to independence with regard to their ability to accomplish the activities of daily living. We at UnumProvident are confident that the impact of the Assistive Technology Act on these applications will be more than adequately represented by others who have presented their views. We share their enthusiastic support of the Act.

However, given our expertise and focus, we want to ensure that an often-neglected area of impact receives adequate representation in your deliberations: the application of assistive technology as supported by the Assistive Technology Act within the work setting.

More often than not, as you will see statistically, the issue around assistive technology and employment involves the "invisibly disabled," those with marginal and/or temporary inability to work. UnumProvident and the employers we insure are committed to helping employees stay at work, and to returning employees to work when disability strikes. It is good business for the employer and the employee. Assistive technology is often critical to that process, and for the small- and medium-sized employer who does not have the resources for internal assistive technology provision, the Act provides a critical link in the chain of events that leads to solutions instead of unemployment.

When employers have the resources to return their disabled employees to work, they instantly have the capacity to implement early intervention solutions that can help employees stay at work in the first place. Similarly, when the stay-at-work problem is solvable, that same employer has taken a giant step towards developing the flexibility and capacity essential to hiring people with more devastating and permanent impairments in meaningful and productive capacities.

UnumProvident Corporation appreciates this opportunity to share our support of the Assistive Technology Act passed by Congress in 1998. As the leading provider of disability income protection insurance and a pioneer of innovative and unique programs that help employees get back to work, we feel we can offer a unique perspective on the positive impact of this legislation.

UnumProvident is a publicly traded insurance holding company formed by the merger of Unum Corporation of Portland, Maine, and Provident Companies, Inc., of Chattanooga, Tenn.

UnumProvident has major centers of U.S. operation in Chattanooga, TN; Portland, ME; Columbia, SC; Glendale, CA; and Worcester, MA. Our international presence includes disability operations in the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan. In addition, the company utilizes the resources of subsidiaries in Pennsylvania, California and Wyoming. The single largest functional area within UnumProvident is our unique Customer Care area, which focuses on delivering expert claim management and empathetic return-to-work support to our customers. More than 3,000 Customer Care employees manage over 400,000 new income protection claims every year.

UnumProvident provides insurance solutions to a wide clientele, ranging from individuals and small employers to Fortune 500 companies. UnumProvident reported total revenue of $9.4 billion for the twelve months ending December 31, 2001. The company holds the following industry-leading positions:

Individual income protection	#1
Long-term disability income protection	#1
Short-term disability income protection	#1
Voluntary workplace benefits	#2
Brokerage long-term care (new sales)	#2

We maintain this leadership position through delivering on our customer commitments: comprehensive product solutions, return-to-work expertise, and highly responsive service.

Our commitments to customers are strengthened by our recognition, endorsement and use of assistive technology solutions as a critical component in employees' return-to-work success.

We would like to commend Congress for the groundbreaking state grants legislation of 1988, and the reauthorization in 1994 that maintained funding for assistive technology resources at the state level. We feel your efforts have made an impact on the lives of many individuals with disabilities, and have benefited the employer segment by providing tactical means to support the return-to-work efforts of their employees. The following comments will support the need for continuation of the Act, the programs it funds, and the competitive edge that it makes possible.

Recommendation

Based on our experience and expertise, UnumProvident submits the following recommendation and supportive rationale to the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness as you evaluate the success of the state Assistive Technology Projects funded by the Assistive Technology Act.

We recommend that Congress continue its support of the Act through maintaining and increasing funding as appropriate for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

UnumProvident is an insurance company, specializing in providing income protection to individuals who suffer a disability. We are in the business of helping individuals who are disabled progress from financial dependence to financial independence. The support we provide to those individuals in their return-to-work efforts is of significant benefit to their employers, and these efforts prove most successful when a true partnership exists among all parties.

Considering our focus and our experience, we are part of a small percentage of companies that need little to no encouragement to make assistive technology solutions available to our employees and customers.

The Assistive Technology Act has made a difference for our company and the people we serve. Our vocational rehabilitation consultants utilize the state resources funded by the Act, and we educate our employer customers to do the same. Our plan designs for employers involve research and consideration of assistive technology solutions. We understand that recovering from disability is an incremental process and this form of support is essential to address the stages of disability.

Many employers are seeking, or will seek, assistance on their own. This trend will continue to increase as awareness of the costs of disability, and the options for controlling those costs, becomes more prevalent. The state organizations funded by the Act are a critical resource for employers of all industries and sizes who are seeking to institute absence management programs in their organizations.

Consumer education is at the foundation of the organizations funded by the Act. Similarly, education is absolutely critical to helping consumers understand the probability of disability and the necessity to plan for such events.

Statistics present a compelling case. In the past two minutes, 104 Americans became disabled.[1] Approximately 54 million Americans (1 in 5) have a disability. This represents 21 percent of the total population of the United States.[2]

To place that in an employer perspective, in 1995, 120,000,000 workdays were lost because of work injuries.[3] CCH Inc., an employment law and human resource information provider, reported in its *2001 Unscheduled Absence Survey* that the average per-employee cost of absenteeism rose sharply from $610 per year in 2000 to $755 in 2001.[4]

As the American population ages, analysts predict a tighter labor market and more mature workers - translating into rising benefit utilization and costs for employers as their workers age. For example, the incidence of long-term disability claims quadruples from workers at age 42 to those at age 57.[5]

The challenge of managing the impact of employee absence on the bottom line is not a new one for employers, but it is of ever-increasing importance in today's competitive marketplace. Employers need solutions - and the Assistive Technology Act provides them. Employers of all sizes are able to test assistive technology solutions before making an investment. The ability to try out products makes good business sense, but most importantly, it's a smart way to support employees in their efforts to get back to work.

At UnumProvident, we have committed significant resources to our return-to-work (RTW) program development resources, supporting our belief that a RTW orientation can make a tremendous difference in employer costs and employee productivity.

Supporting RTW Success

At the core of UnumProvident's return-to-work commitment is its Customer Care Center, the company's claim management organization. The company has a truly unique model in which claims are immediately assessed and triaged to pathways based on expected duration and type of injury or illness. This ensures that expert, specialized resources are applied to every claim, and is in contrast to more traditional geographic- or policy-based models.

In every step of this pioneering model, our employees seek ways to proactively assist insureds in their return-to-work efforts.

The result? Our Customer Care Center manages more than 400,000 new claims each year and pays, across all subsidiaries, $3.6 billion annually in disability claims. Each year we refer more than 100,000 of our disabled customers to our extensive in-house clinical and vocational rehabilitation experts for personalized assistance. Nearly half of our new claimants are able to return to work within six months of receiving benefits.

RTW Benefits Employers and Individuals

UnumProvident understands that the best insurance against unnecessary work disruption is the ability to return an employee to a productive lifestyle in a timely fashion.

Each year, more than 750,000 Americans experience injuries or illnesses that keep them out of work for five months or longer.[6]

For the employer, this may mean absorbing extensive and unnecessary lost time costs. Employee replacement and retraining costs become an additional, unexpected expense - and can have a direct impact on competitiveness. This can pose particular challenges to smaller employers who may not have the capital to absorb the direct and hidden costs of lost time.

Regardless of company size, the employers who demonstrate the greatest success in controlling the impact of work disruption and lost time are those who incorporate formal return-to-work strategies within their employee relations activities and benefit plans. Assistive technology can and should play a big role in such strategies. At UnumProvident, we offer our employer customers a consultative service to help them structure policies and procedures to achieve return-to-work success.

Our return-to-work solutions for employers blend policy and staff development opportunities through:

- Return-to-work programs that assist employers in defining the impact of lost time and creating practical return-to-work strategies;
- Assistance that enhances the employer's capacity to apply ergonomic and computer-based assistive technology solutions;
- Integrated disability management that assists organizations in determining its readiness and capacity to integrate the wide range of its disability insurance, workers' compensation, lost time and healthcare programs; and
- Absence management strategies to evaluate, select and develop programs that manage FMLA, intermittent and casual lost workdays.

Visible Impact

Behind the disability statistics are the personal stories. Disability affects all walks of life, and can strike at any time. As a large employer, we've seen the impact disability can have on our own employees, and the resulting triumph they feel when they are able to resume work. The following composite examples illustrate the importance of a strong partnership between the employer, insurer and individual - and how assistive technology can make the difference between staying at home and returning to work.

- A man suffering from quadriplegia proves that physical disability doesn't need to be an impediment to succeeding in a high-level job with a large corporation. He is fully productive in his role as a medical director with the help of a puff-stick and Dragon Naturally Speaking 4.5 speech recognition system - technology solutions made available by his employer.

  He augments Dragon with a headset, a keyboard anchored microphone, a tele-dictation system that allows him to dictate long memos and receive the text in e-mail, and a scanner that allows him to manage visual records and forms as PowerPoint images. These assistive technology tools help him perform his daily duties within the corporation.

- A key employee working for a small business owner develops a spinal cyst, causing neurological problems and restrictions in her ability to use her hands, stand and walk. The employee and her employer consult with a vocational rehabilitation consultant and an ergonomist, and identify a range of solutions including a more suitable office chair, a remote headset for the phone, and footrests.

  In addition, the rehabilitation consultant refers the employer to the state assistive technology resource. The employer tests and ultimately purchases voice-activated assistive technology software to help the employee return to work. The combination of ergonomic and assistive technology solutions allows the employee to perform her job in greater comfort and to increase her office time, and allows her employer to retain a key employee and avoid the costs associated with replacement and retraining.

- An elementary school teacher suffers an ankle fracture that requires surgery. She feels very strongly that she wants to return to work, but knows she would be unable to walk around the school buildings or make her way to second-story classrooms. She partners with her employer and a vocational rehabilitation consultant to identify accommodations to support her return to work, including isolating her duties to the first floor of the building and providing her with a rechargeable scooter to transport her around the school.

  Her employer makes additional accommodations, including letting the teacher end each of her classes early so she can move around the corridors while they were clear of students. The teacher is able to return to her full-time teaching position as a result of creative combination of assistive technology and practical adjustments.

- Assistive technology can often be accomplished through "low-tech" means that require a resourceful approach and modest investment. For example, one hearing-impaired individual was unable to respond during his company's fire drill exercises. The employee did not work in a common area with other individuals, and so was not in a position to notice a sudden flurry of activity. The employer implemented a simple solution through purchasing a vibrating pager for the employee, and programming the device to go into motion at the beginning of a fire drill.

The examples above paint a small but illuminating picture of how assistive technology supports return to work and stay at work for individuals, translating into better competitive positioning for employers of all sizes and industries.

Without question, employers who initiate and support aggressive disability management programs - complete with assistive technology capabilities - see very positive results.

Conclusion

There is great dignity associated with a person's ability to work and great value in the ability to live a full and independent lifestyle. This philosophy - and its focus on abilities - forms the foundation of our work at UnumProvident.

Statistics show that the general population does want to be active in society and part of the workforce. Sixty percent of Americans not working say that they would like to if the opportunity were made available.[7]

For those of us in the income protection insurance industry, it is both our job and responsibility to ensure we make that opportunity a reality. For Congress, it is essential that you recognize the positive impact of the Assistive Technology Act and its contributions to economic competitiveness and employee productivity, both in past years and well into the future.

Thank you for affording UnumProvident Corporation this opportunity to testify in support of the Assistive Technology Act.

Contact

Should the Committee require further input or explanation of this written testimony, please contact the following individual:

Donna Mundy
Senior Vice President, Government Relations
UnumProvident Corporation
207-575-4354

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[2] McNeil, J.M. (1997) Americans with Disabilities: 1994-95. U.S. Bureau of the Census Current Population Report P70-61. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce.

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[4] "CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey," CCH Incorporated and Harris Interactive, 2001.

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APPENDIX J - WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY ROBERT A. STODDEN, PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTERS ON DISABILITIES, AND DIRECTOR, CENTER ON DISABILITY STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII, MANOA

AUCD
ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTERS ON DISABILITIES
RESEARCH, EDUCATION, SERVICE

● 8630 Fenton Street
Suite 410
Silver Spring, MD 20910
t: 301-588-8252
f: 301-588-2842
www.aucd.org

Robert A. Stodden, Ph.D.
President

Robert Baron, M.A.
President-Elect

Gloria L. Krahn, Ph.D., M.P.H.
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David M. Mank, Ph.D.
Past President

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National Training Directors Council

Joe Evans, Ph.D.
Member at Large

Dolce L. Hertzberg
RN, MSN, CRRN
Interdisciplinary Council

Jan Nisbet, Ph.D.
Member at Large

Kathleen P. Olson, Ph.D.
National Community Education Directors Council

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Multicultural Council

Sarah Rule, Ph.D.
Member at Large

Norb Ryan, M.A.
Council on Consumer Affairs

Bruce K. Shapiro, M.D.
Member at Large

George Jesien, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Assistive Technology Act Programs: Past Success and Remaining Challenges

Respectfully Submitted to:

The 21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee of the House Committee on the Education and the Workforce

March 21, 2002

Formerly known as AAUAP
(American Association of
University Affiliated Programs)

Representative Howard "Buck" McKeon
Chair, Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
2242 RHOB (Rayburn)
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Johnny Isakson
Vice Chair, Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
132 CHOB (Cannon)
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Patsy Mink
Ranking Democrat
2210 RHOB (Rayburn)
Washington, DC 20510

Representative John Boehner
Chair, House Education and Workforce Committee
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative George Miller
Ranking Member, Committee on Education and the Workforce
2205 RHOB (Rayburn)
Washington, DC 20510

March 21, 2002

Dear Members of the Subcommittee:

As Board President of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities in Washington, DC, a network of interdisciplinary Centers advancing policy and practice for and with people with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and communities, and on behalf of tens of thousands of citizens with disabilities of all ages served by our member organizations, I am writing to describe the value of programs funded under Title I ("Grants to States") of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 and provide a few examples of how they positively impact the lives of people with disabilities. I also want to describe several of the challenges that remain and request that you give your most serious consideration to maintaining a strong federal role in the provision of assistive technology.

Background

As you know, the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 supports State Assistive Technology (AT) Programs in 56 states and territories. The state grant program promotes access to assistive technology for people with disabilities and universal design of information technology so that people with disabilities will not be left out of the digital revolution and can lead more productive, integrated lives in the community. Together with protection and advocacy services, these programs form a national infrastructure that ensures access to technology for people with disabilities. Thirteen of our University Centers are the state lead agencies for the state grant programs. Each provides strong, consumer-responsive services in their respective states. Our member programs leverage the expertise of the state grant programs to provide training, technical assistance, and AT services to thousands of persons with disabilities and their families. These programs are the leaders in fostering and maintaining interagency collaboration and in developing AT policies in their states. Four University Centers are the primary grantees in their states for the alternative financing programs funded under Title III of the AT Act and are the same model programs highlighted in President Bush's New Freedom Initiative. An additional 15 University Centers are affiliated with state grant programs and provide training, technical assistance and other services on behalf of state grant programs. In total, twenty-eight of the 56 state grant programs have a direct link to our network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service. If these state grant programs are allowed to expire, there will be a tremendous gap in states' ability to provide effective AT information and direct services to people with disabilities in the community.

Success: Positive Impact on Lives of People with Disabilities

In Montana, a public school teacher who developed nodules on his vocal chords was able to continue teaching because he got appropriate assistive technology that enables him to speak and be heard by his middle school students. He is able to continue working in the profession of his choice. In Kansas a 51-year old woman worked through the state grant program to find assistive technology that enables her to continue living independently. She does not need to live in a nursing home; she can remain in her own home.

Many state grant programs have worked to ensure access to eGovernment websites. For example, the state grant program in Arizona worked collaboratively with the Government Information Technology Agency and other groups to develop standards and policies relating to accessible web design in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Now, countless Arizonans with disabilities have access to eGovernment services that were inaccessible a year ago.

Our programs have had tremendous success in the years that they've received federal funds. They've leveraged non-federal dollars to expand their activities to reach more individuals, they've provided training and technical assistance to tens of thousands of consumers, family members and service providers, and they've impacted state laws and policies to improve access to assistive technology devices and services for individuals. Below is a brief example of some of these activities.

State Program	Activity	Impact/Outcome
Arizona	Provide technical assistance and training to state agencies about web access and 508	People in Arizona can use eGovernment websites for state government information.
Colorado	Leverage non-federal funds for acquisition of employment related technology	$1,394,000 (1999-present, for AT services and targeted training). $498,000 annual/ongoing.
Iowa	Provide information and referral about AT devices, services, and funding.	In 2001, 8,728 consumers, family members and service providers
Montana	Established the first and only comprehensive AT demonstration and evaluation center in Montana, using a variety of on-site and distance technologies to serve people in remote communities.	○ Central source of AT information and support. • Provides necessary evaluation services and documentation to enable people to gain access to AT. • Provides training and technical assistance to a network of therapists to respond to AT needs of individuals with developmental disabilities.
Pennsylvania	Leverage non-federal funds for alternative financing programs	$1,000,000 (1998-present, state appropriations for alternative financing program).

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State Program	Activity	Impact/Outcome
Utah	Leverage state funds for the purchase of assistive technology through state service agencies.	• $2,105,000 (1993-present, for purchase of AT). $600,000 annual/ongoing. • $4,588,000 (1993-present, for AT services). $530,000 annual/ongoing. • $75,000 (1993-present, private donations for alternative financing program).

Leveraging of Non-Federal Funds

During the past decade many states have been successful in leveraging non-federal funds to support components of the federal mandate in their states. For example, Utah has generated approximately $1 million per year in state appropriated funds to be used for the purchase of assistive technology (AT). Nebraska has generated nearly $2 million over the past 3 years to provide direct assistive technology services through the home and community-based waiver program. Colorado secured a large state contract ($498,000 per year) to provide intensive assistive technology training and technical assistance to education staff and related service providers statewide. State legislatures and agency administrators provide funding for specific assistive technology initiatives but not to support the infrastructure that gets the funds to people with disabilities in the most appropriate and efficient manner. Without core federal support, the ability to secure funds for training, technical assistance, services, dissemination, etc. would be lost. The table below conservatively demonstrates the recent success of several states in leveraging non-federal funds to meet the ever-emerging needs of people with disabilities. It is not possible to calculate the fiscal impact of assistive technology policy development, public awareness, and training activities on the appropriations to specific state agencies for assistive technology-related purposes. Nor is it possible to determine the financial benefits of myriad state activities such as those that resulted in state Medicaid agencies revising its coverage policies to begin providing assistive technology (augmentative and alternative communication devices is a specific example) to people with disabilities.

Leveraged Funds

State	Non-federal Funds (Purpose)
Arkansas	$1,667,794 (1995-present, for AT services, targeted training, and revolving loan fund). Ongoing amount varies.
Colorado	$1,394,000 (1999-present, for AT services and targeted training). $498,000 annual/ongoing.
Georgia	$227,000 (1997-present, for AT services). Ongoing amount varies.
Illinois	$440,000 (1997-present, for AT services). $160,000 annual/ongoing.
Kansas	$1,041,000 (1997-present, for AT services). $210,000 annual/ongoing. $650,000 (one time state appropriation for alternative financing program).
Kentucky	$2,006,900 (1998-present, for AT services and equipment recycling). Ongoing amount varies.
Missouri	$3,640,000 (1998-present, for AT services through DD council initiatives and early intervention). Ongoing amount varies.

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State	Non-federal Funds (Purpose)
Nebraska	$4,039,357 (1997-present, for home and community-based waiver service programs, job site assessments, purchase of AT). $1,100,000 annual/ongoing.
Pennsylvania	$3,219,000 (1997-present, for state lending library). $890,000 annual/ongoing. $2,000,090 (1999-present, for VR grant program to small businesses). $1,000,000 annual/ongoing.
Utah	$2,105,000 (1993-present, for purchase of AT). $600,000 annual/ongoing. $4,588,000 (1993-present, for AT services). $530,000 annual/ongoing. $75,000 (1993-present, private donations for alternative financing program).

Remaining Challenges

While much progress has been made, tremendous advances in technology and public policy have outpaced state efforts to ensure access to, availability of, and funding for appropriate assistive technology. During the past decade, these advances have been met with state grant program initiatives to: (a) improve acquisition of new technology, (b) provide training in specific areas of need, (c) develop equipment loan programs and equipment recycling programs, and (d) improve access to accessible information technology in business and government. Emerging issues such as the *Olmstead* decision, the New Freedom Initiative, eGovernment initiatives, telecommuting, IDEA '97 and its impending reauthorization, Section 508 final guidelines, personal computer use in homes, use of the Internet for personal and business purposes (eCommerce), the shift of public health care to managed care and PPOs, Ticket to Work: Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWIIA), election reform and electronic voting, accessibility provisions under the ADA, improved medical technology that prolongs the lives of people with severe disabilities, and the Telecommunications Act Sect. 255 were not anticipated when sunset provisions were conceived. Technology-related initiatives and policies are evolving as rapidly as the technology itself.

Unfortunately, there are some who believe that state grant programs should be eliminated. They use the argument that these programs were "systems change" and that after a period of years their work should be completed. This argument is flawed for several reasons:

First, the system(s) to be effected have evolved. Improved medical technology is extending the lives of people with severe, life-long disabilities. This was not the case a decade ago. The application of technology to individual lives has become more complex as health and community living issues become more complex. Policy changes such as those listed above were not anticipated when the sunset provisions were originally conceived. The systems and systemic policies requiring change are evolving as rapidly as the technology itself—in this environment, systems change is never complete, it is cyclical.

Second, technology has changed dramatically. Issues of telecommuting, the Internet, and advances in personal computer technology have evolved exponentially since the "seed money" idea was introduced. Keeping pace with changing societal needs, policies, and rapidly advancing technology requires an intense, across-discipline approach.

Third, professionals in public and private service systems, and in the insurance industry, are constantly in need of updated information regarding the broad variety of assistive technology

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advances for specific functional limitations—a function that state entities do not perform. This is essential for the providers and for individuals with disabilities to ensure that the most appropriate technology is acquired in any given case.

Fourth, the expertise required to keep pace with rapidly developing technology and its application to the lives of people with disabilities is not likely to be found in any single state system. The needs of people with disabilities are individual as are the specific technology applications to enhance independence. Only those systems that consider individual needs across the lifespan and in the variety of functional domains present in any individual life (i.e., across disciplines) will be successful in meeting individual assistive technology needs. The consumer responsive state grant programs are meeting these needs; state governments are not able fill this role.

Finally, state AT grant programs represent the only public entity in states where staff is wholly dedicated to across-discipline assistive technology solutions regardless of age or eligibility. State-run programs, by statute, limit their services to those for whom reimbursement is forthcoming. For example, the special education system focuses its attention on children through age 21 and provides assistive technology only if it is required for the child to receive free appropriate public education. Likewise, success in rehabilitation systems is based on preparation for and engaging in gainful employment. Public and private insurance agencies provide technology only if it is medically necessary. These entities do not provide life-span focused training, public awareness or outreach regarding assistive technology. State AT grant programs provide this service, thus enhancing seamless access to assistive technology that promotes independence across various life domains.

Some have declared that assistive technology-related federal funds should be directed toward helping people purchase assistive technology, not toward systems that provide public awareness, policy development, outreach, training, and technical assistance. Again, there are several flaws in this argument:

First, the Administration's FY2002 budget funded the AT alternative financing program (Title III of the AT Act) at $40 million when the state capacity to deal with such an influx of Title III grant funds is not adequate. States are learning how to best use funds under the existing Title III funding levels so as to reduce waste, duplication, and supplanting funding responsibilities of existing programs. This task rests squarely on the shoulders of Title I state AT grant programs that are to be eliminated.

Second, state grant programs teach people (consumers and service providers) about appropriate assistive technology and connect them with agencies or others who can help them purchase the technology (through entitlement or eligibility programs, or through insurance or private payment mechanisms). State AT grant programs form the "coordination" function of information and referral, training, policy monitoring, and collaboration among state agencies, private providers and assistive technology vendors. This is not a function that state government is willing or able to perform.

Finally, federal policy has long called for alternative funding mechanisms such as those described in Title III of the AT Act of 1998. Most recently this was articulated in the May 2000 report by the National Council on Disability, "Federal Policy Barriers to Assistive Technology." However, alternative financing was only one of eleven recommendations. The development of AT loan programs assumes that these programs are part of a larger context of state-based, AT-related programs (see recommendations 6 and 9 of the May 2000 document). Similar recommendations were made by the Administration in the fall of 1998 in the "Blueprint for the Millenium: An Analysis of Regional Hearings on Assistive Technology for People with Disabilities" published by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) at the US Department of Education. Federal support to implement one Executive branch recommendation without federal support of the infrastructure to ensure successful implementation is a poor public policy strategy.

Need for Federal Role

The current Assistive Technology Act includes a provision requiring a sunset of state grant programs, which will occur in cycles that gradually decrease their funding until all Title I programs are defunct. In FY 2003, funding for 23 states will be eliminated, and the unraveling of the national infrastructure for assistive technology will begin. It is essential that this problem be corrected. With the digital divide continuing to leave people with disabilities on the wrong side, this is not the time to back away from the federal commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind. Rather, this is a time for the federal government to preserve and strengthen the programs that provide people with disabilities with the tools they need to be independent and productive. The state grant programs (also known as collectively as Tech Act Projects or AT Act projects) and the assistive technology activities of the protection and advocacy programs provide mechanisms to make sure that people with disabilities will not be left behind.

In 1998, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) published findings and recommendations in the "Blueprint for the Millenium: An Analysis of Regional Hearings on Assistive Technology for People with Disabilities." It described continued and emerging barriers to consumer acquisition of assistive technology. Proposed solutions to these barriers clearly indicated the need for the federal government to continue its support of the original mandate of the AT Act or Tech Act programs given in 1988. In response to the document, NIDRR invested nearly $1,000,000 to develop a national assistive technology data collection system. This data is to be used to monitor local, state, and national trends in AT use and acquisition, access to AT devices and services, and other consumer issues with regard to assistive technology. State assistive technology grant programs are the logical entity to address this new component of the federal mandate.

Summary

AUCD urges you to support actions that eliminate the required decrease in funding for the state grant programs and waive the mandatory sunset. Additionally, we ask that you consider a $500,000 minimum for each state grant and establishment of $100,000 for each Protection and Advocacy System under Title I to enable those entities to provide adequate advocacy services. AUCD's request of $34 million for Title I of the Assistive Technology Act is consistent with that of many other disability advocacy groups. AUCD cannot stress enough how vital it is that Congress prevent the elimination of the 23 state programs which have proven to be key to enabling people with disabilities be more independent, productive and integrated into the community.

For more information regarding our commitment to ensuring independence for people with disabilities through supports such as assistive technology, please contact the AUCD Director of Legislative Affairs, Donna Meltzer at 301-588-8252 or dlmeltzer@aucd.org or our Assistive Technology Policy Specialist, Marty Blair at 435-797-3886 or mblair@aucd.org.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Stodden
AUCD Board President and
Director of Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii, Manoa

APPENDIX K - WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION, BETHESDA, MARYLAND

AOTA® The American
Occupational Therapy
Association, Inc.

Occupational Therapy:
Skills for the Job of Living

STATEMENT ON THE HEARING ON ASSESSING THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998

Before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON 21ST CENTURY COMPETITIVENESS

March 21, 2002

Contact:
Leslie Jackson
301-652-6611 x 2023

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is pleased that the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness is holding a hearing today on the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. The law was first enacted in 1988 (P.L. 100-407) as the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act, then renewed 10 years later as the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-394).

The Assistive Technology Act ("Tech Act") is scheduled to sunset this year. Without congressional action, 23 state programs will expire on September 30th, 2002. Today's hearing is the first one the House of Representatives has held in nine years. AOTA commends committee chairman, Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA) for his leadership in helping to enact an amendment last session that extended the expiration date for one year. Today's hearing will allow the Subcommittee to learn more about the law and consider how to proceed.

The "Tech Act" provides funding for state level assistive technology programs that help individuals with disabilities to access communications devices, adaptive computers, and other assistive technology devices and services that they may need at home, at work, in school and in the community. State assistive technology projects have assisted individuals who, due to functional limitations, require assistive technology (AT) to improve their quality of life, prepare for employment, and advance educational opportunities. Occupational therapists are frequently involved in these AT programs, helping to determine the appropriate type of AT equipment needed and how to use the equipment in the individual's everyday activities.

The importance of assistive technology for persons with disabilities is clearly illustrated in President Bush's *New Freedom Initiative*, which includes a number of assistive technology programming. It is vital that Congress continues its support of the Tech Act and the work of the state AT projects.

AOTA represents 45,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants and students who work to assist individuals to perform everyday activities, or "occupations", including the use of assistive technology. Occupational therapy is a health and rehabilitation service covered by private health insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, workers' compensation, vocational programs, behavioral health programs, early intervention programs, and education programs.

The American
Occupational Therapy
Association, Inc.

4720 Montgomery Lane
Bethesda, MD 20814-3425

301-652-2682
301-652-7711 Fax

800-377-8555 TDD
www.aota.org

APPENDIX L - WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY NANCY CREAGHEAD, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Oversight Hearing on

THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT (P.L. 105-394)

Submitted by
Nancy Creaghead, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, President
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
March 21, 2002

Thank you, Chairman McKeon and members of the Subcommittee, for having this oversight hearing on the Assistive Technology Act (AT Act). As president of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I submit this testimony on behalf of over 105,000 speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and speech, language and hearing scientists to urge your continued support for State Assistive Technology (AT) Projects funded through the AT Act. ASHA's professionals appreciate the opportunity to present our views to the Subcommittee concerning AT programs and their value to children and adults with speech, language, or hearing disabilities.

We would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership in securing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2002 Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill which extended funding for state AT grant programs for an additional year. As a result, nine state programs (Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska and Utah) are able to continue providing services to individuals with disabilities through September 30, 2002.

Don't Eliminate State Programs

However, this year, 23 state AT programs will expire if there is no action to extend the program. In addition to the nine state programs above that were level-funded last year, the following 14 states are in jeopardy: Alaska, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

This potential elimination of state AT programs comes at a time when the number of people who could benefit from AT is increasing. In 1998, when the AT Act was last reauthorized, there were approximately 9.2 million people in the United States who had a health problem which required some type of AT. Since research shows that most disabilities occur to those who are over 40 years of age, as the population of the United States continues to age, more people than ever will have disabilities that technology can assist. As technology itself continues to advance, more and more options will become available for people with disabilities, options that do not exist now and did not exist in 1998. Without continuation of state AT programs, people with disabilities will find it extremely difficult to know what their technology options are; receive services; and afford themselves of short-term loan, low interest purchase, or "pre-owned" AT devices. Assistive technology and services may be available only to the elite who can afford it.

While the original legislation intended that individual states take over the cost of the AT programs, states have been faced with severe financial struggles due to the downturn in the economy, increased funding for safety and security measures after September 11, and, most recently, a reduction in tobacco settlement funds that had been counted on for health, education, and other programs. State AT programs need federal support through formula grants now more than ever if people with disabilities are to realize the potential benefits from technology.

Benefit of State Programs

According to ASHA member Beth Mineo Mollica, Ph.D., the Director of the Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (DATI), "Our project is the central source for AT awareness, training access to equipment for demonstration and short-term loan, funding and policy information, and advocacy in the state. A survey we conducted last summer revealed that the vast majority of respondents have nowhere else to turn for an AT-focused newsletter, equipment demos and loans, and training and technical assistance related to AT. Losing the AT project in Delaware would deliver a severe blow to its citizens who need AT supports and services."

Dr. Mollica's survey data of the readership of DATI's quarterly newsletter indicate the impact of the state AT program. Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents indicated that laws or program policies had changed to help persons with disabilities get AT. Fifty-seven percent (57%) find it easier to get assistance to purchase AT devices and services, and seventy-one percent (71%) believe that private and public agencies are working together more closely to increase accessibility of AT devices and services. While these data indicate success of the program, there is still room for improvement.

Without federal funding, these words of a mother of a 4-year-old son with a severe hearing loss would never have been spoken: "With the assistance of the Kids Assistive Technology program [Missouri], a better quality hearing aid costing over $2,500 was purchased . . .The change in David has been phenomenal!. . . all of the teachers noticed a change. He is hearing better, and he now talks non-stop, and his speech is clearer. Assistive technology has made our family a happier family! Continue to fund money for AT."
Similar stories could be told by patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease) in the Durham (NC) Veterans Affairs Medical Center who were able to use electronic communication devices because of the state AT program, a mother in Pennsylvania whose son can now participate in the regular classroom because of his AT, speech-language pathologists in the Worcester (MA) public schools who see every day how assistive technology allows students to interact effectively with their environment just like their peers, and the millions of others who benefit from state AT programs.

Communication disabilities isolate people from other people and frustrate efforts to learn, grow, be employed, and stay independent. Nobody should have to accept these consequences. Access to proper treatment, services, equipment, training and advocacy can eliminate or minimize this impact. State AT projects promote this access and need to be continued.

State AT grant programs also promote the President's New Freedom Initiative to "ensure that all Americans with disabilities have the tools to use their skills, and make more of their own choices." State AT grant programs include activities that support the Initiative such as outreach, advocacy, training, low-interest loan programs, equipment demonstrations and other supports and services. Technology has improved the quality of life for people with disabilities of any age by helping them speak, hear, write, learn, work, play and participate meaningfully in society. Its use needs to be promoted, not de-emphasized.

Recommendations

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) believes that it is in the best interest of people with disabilities, including the more than 42 million Americans with speech, language, or hearing disabilities, many of whom can benefit from assistive technology, to:

- **Maintain the assistive technology formula grant program for states**
- **Provide technical assistance to state education systems on integrating technology into services and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities**
- **Promote information exchange between the states and agencies within each state**
- **Provide support for the legal rights of people with disabilities to access assistive technology.**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, ASHA appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments as you review the Assistive Technology Act. We look forward to working with you and the Subcommittee to maintain the valuable programs and services that the AT Act makes available to the millions of people with disabilities, including those with communication disabilities, throughout the United States.

APPENDIX M - WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY STEVEN I. JACOBS, PRESIDENT, IDEAL (INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES: ENABLING ADVOCACY LINK) AT THE NCR CORPORATION

Testimony of Steven I. Jacobs
President, IDEAL at NCR
Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and the Workforce
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
Hearing: "Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998"
March 21, 2002

Chairperson McKeon, Vice Chairperson Isakson and members of the Subcommittee...

My name is Steve Jacobs. I am President of IDEAL at NCR. IDEAL is a not-for-profit, all-volunteer, employee-led organization. IDEAL stands for Individuals with Disabilities: Enabling Advocacy Link. IDEAL at NCR's mission is twofold. First, we support NCR employees with disabilities. Second, we support developing Information Technology (IT) that is as accessible as technically possible and economically feasible. There are chapters of IDEAL at NCR, AT&T, Lucent Technologies, Agere Systems and Avaya.

I am also a member of the National Task Force on Technology and Disability. A Charles Stewart Mott Foundation grant funds the task force. We will release a report later this year. Our report looks at added ways to increase the affordability of Assistive Technology (AT) and design mainstream products to be more usable.

Thank you for inviting me to provide testimony on how, I believe, we can lessen the cost of Assistive Technology and place it in the hands of more consumers who can benefit from it.

I praise you for holding a hearing to review the nation's experience under the Tech Act. Manufacturers of Information Technology recognize the critical role AT plays in improving the quality-of-life, independence and employability of Americans with disabilities.

Industry wants to maximize the interoperability between Information Technology (IT) and Assistive Technology (AT). AT helps people with disabilities use IT products. Understanding the access needs of people with disabilities helps industry-based engineers design mainstream products that can, more effectively, accommodate consumers who:

- Live within low-bandwidth information infrastructures (5 billion worldwide);
- Are 65 years-of-age and older (486 million worldwide);
- Never learned to read (1.6 billion worldwide); and,
- Only speak, write or understand English as a Second Language (300+ million worldwide);

I offer three suggestions that, I believe, can make AT more accessible, available and affordable.

1. I recommend the committee authorize funding in support of assessing the potential benefits of bundling software-based AT with new computers. Several methods of distribution can achieve this objective. It will be important to protect the financial interests of AT manufacturers during this process. An AT distribution program of this type has the potential to:
    - Place AT into the hands of more people with disabilities;
    - Lessen the selling price of software-based AT;
    - Enable people with disabilities to "carry their AT with them" to school, libraries, college and places of employment... because AT will be available wherever a computer is available.
    - Increase revenue to AT manufacturers;
    - Enable teachers and professors, using elementary, secondary and post-secondary education computer labs, accommodate a wide range of mainstream learning styles and preferences;
    - Create demand-pull for added AT training courses;
    - Provide a broad-base of user experience in support of resolving AT and IT interoperability issues;
    - Meet the access needs of "baby boomers" who are computer literate and will want to carry their use of computers long into their senior years; and,

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- Meet the needs of people who use ESL, live in low-bandwidth infrastructures and are of low and no literacy.

Equally important, is the need for colleges to train engineering students to design for access. This core competency will be critical in securing industry-based engineering jobs in the future.

Rehabilitation professionals use AT centers to evaluate, accommodate and train people needing AT. There continues to be far too few AT centers.

2. I recommend the committee authorize appropriations in support of assessing the potential benefits of creating more centers with expanded scopes of operation. This will need to involve rehabilitation professionals, interested members of the AT and IT industry and colleges. Creating new centers with expanded scopes of operation could serve to:
    - Familiarize engineers from the IT industry with AT;
    - Provide a forum for interested members of the AT and IT industry to identify and resolve AT and IT interoperability issues;
    - Provide engineers with a place to test the interoperability of their IT products with a wide range of AT products;
    - Provide colleges a place for their engineering students to learn about AT and the access needs of people with disabilities,
    - Provide a place for all stakeholders to get to know one another, network, learn from each other's experiences and work together in support of achieving common objectives.
3. I recommend the committee authorize funding to sponsor competitions to determine which colleges are most successful at:
    - Training undergraduate and graduate engineering students about AT; and,
    - Training working engineers and designers at college-sponsored workshops and conference sessions;

With the support of Congress and the Bush Administration and with a spirit of cooperation between the AT and IT industry, rehabilitation professionals, and colleges, I believe we can improve the ways in which our government currently supports:

- Assessing the AT needs of people with disabilities;
- Placing AT into the hands of people who need it;
- Maximizing interoperability between AT and IT;
- Continually improving AT products; and,
- Lowering the cost of AT.

In closing, I want to state that IDEAL, and others members of the AT and IT industry, would be happy to work with the Committee to further develop these recommendations.

APPENDIX N - LETTER SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY DAVID SCHERER, OUTREACH COORDINATOR, DAKOTALINK, RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA

DakotaLink
INDEPENDENCE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY
A Project of the South Dakota Division of Rehabilitation Services

Rep. George Miller, Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce

Representative Miller,

I am writing to thank you for your recognition of the importance of technology in the lives of persons with disabilities by participating in the March 21st, 2002 congressional hearing titled, "Assessing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998".

I understand this hearing is part of the information gathering process in consideration of reauthorization of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. The activities supported by the Assistive Technology Act in South Dakota have had a great impact upon the lives of individuals with disabilities, their families and those who provide services to them.

As reauthorization consideration proceeds, I urge your committee to ensure no states are eliminated from the program, as 23 states are currently scheduled to lose funding as of September 30, 2002. I would gladly work with you should you require additional information regarding the impact of this Act within the State of South Dakota.

Feel free to contact me if I can be of any assistance either by e-mail, dscherer@tie.net, and telephone at (605)-394-1876, or by writing to me at 1925 Plaza Blvd., Rapid City, South Dakota, 57702.

Respectfully Yours,

David Scherer

David Scherer
Outreach Coordinator

APPENDIX O - WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY DIANE GOLDEN, PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF TECH ACT PROJECTS, SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

Association of Tech Act Projects
1 West Old State Capitol Plaza, Suite 100
Springfield, Illinois 62701

March 20, 2002

The Honorable Howard "Buck" McKeon
Chairman
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the full membership of the Association of Tech Act Projects (ATAP) thank you for interest in assistive technology and the hope and promise it offers to people of all ages with disabilities. We very much appreciate your willingness to convene this oversight hearing on the Assistive Technology Act of 1988. We look forward to the hearing as an opportunity to inform the members of the Subcommittee of our accomplishments to date as grantees under this Act and the many challenges that remain.

Attached is a statement for the hearing record submitted on behalf of the membership of the Association of Tech Act Projects. If you have further questions about ATAP or the projects it represents please do not hesitate to contact our Washington Consultant, Ellin Nolan and Jane West at 202-289-3900.

Thank you again for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

Diane Golden
President, ATAP

217-522-7985 voice 217-522-9966 tty 217-522-8067 fax
Illinois Assistive Technology Project, Temporary Fiscal Agent

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Submitted to: Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness

On Behalf of the Assistive Technology Project

Date: March 2 1st, 2002
Hearing on Assistive Technology Act of 1998

Association of Tech Act Projects
528 South Fifth Street, Suite 100
Springfield, Illinois 62701

On behalf of the Association of Tech Act Projects, thank you for convening this hearing to review the status of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. It has been almost 10 years since oversight of this important program was addressed by the U. S. House of Representatives and we applaud your interest and concern.

ATAP is an association of Tech Act Project directors that was formed several years ago with two goals in mind: to strengthen our capacity as colleagues to share information and experience, thereby strengthening the infrastructure that is the hallmark of this program; and to promote the continued federal investment in assistive technology for people with disabilities.

The original statute-enacted in 1988-was forward thinking at the time and designed to make sure individuals with disabilities, who had so much to gain by the development of new technologies, were truly able to reap the benefits. No one knew at that time what effect emerging technology would have on our lives in the year 2002. We knew, however, that the potential was great. The actual accomplishments are frankly beyond our wildest dreams.

Our experience as Tech Act Project Directors has taught us that assistive technology has the power to help people live independently, pursue education and enter the world of work. Our role in the states, designated by our respective governors, is to inform consumers, other citizens, employers, and representatives from both the public and the private sector about ways to enhance accessibility to technology for people with disabilities. Some of these adaptations are low cost-some expensive. We advise consumers of technology about the best choices they can make. We work with lenders to encourage the availability of capital for low-interest loans to purchase technology. We work with organizations that serve older citizens on low-cost ways for them to remain in their homes. We work with Independent Living Centers to assist individuals with disabilities in accomplishing their goals. We work with schools to advise them how to collectively purchase technology at the lowest possible cost-technology that allows children with special needs to attend their neighborhood schools. We work with representatives of state and local government on making websites, phone lines, voting booths and other services universally accessible. In other words, our activities and accomplishments are only limited by resources and imagination.

For example, Missouri's Kids Assistive Technology (KAT) program provides funding for assistive technology and home modifications for children with disabilities. In 2000-01, 59 Missouri families received funding and to date in 2001-02 another 60 families received funding for van lifts, home modifications, hearing aids, augmentative communication devices, wheelchairs, etc. Funding is only available for about half of those who apply.

217-522-7985 voice 217-522-9966 tty 217-522-8067 fax
Illinois Assistive Technology Project, Temporary Fiscal Agent

It has been suggested that if the services we provide-making sure that people with disabilities have access to technology-were important, the states would willingly replace this modest federal investment. We respectfully disagree. We believe it is the appropriate role of the federal government to lead the way---to say to the public, to private sector providers and to state leaders-this assistive technology is important. The federal government makes this a priority and you should as well. The federal contribution must be matched with state, local and private sector investment to accomplish our goals. That is an appropriate and important partnership that has been replicated throughout the government.

In many states we have effectively leveraged state and local dollars, private sector and foundation dollars, to match the federal contribution. For instance, in Massachusetts, an Assistive Technology advocate helped a 36-year-old mother of two young children coordinate funding for assistive technology and home modifications through community charitable resources and insurance. The woman, Grace, has ALS and less than three years to live. Grace desperately wanted to spend her last days with her husband and children instead of being placed into a nursing home. Today Grace has the daily living assistive technology she needs. The home modifications are in progress. Grace will not have to die alone in a nursing home and her children can spend as much time as possible with their mother. In other states, the ability to leverage funds has increasingly become more difficult due to our nation's economic downturn and many state's budget situations.

As with many other services that the government funds for individuals with disabilities, we believe the benefits of investing in assistive technology far out weigh the costs. How do you put a price on independence or access?

Next year the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 is scheduled for reauthorization by the Congress. We look forward to working with you to develop new ways to support access to technology for people with disabilities. We urge your continued support for sustaining this important funding to all 50 states and the territories until that reauthorization can be completed. On behalf of the millions of individuals with disabilities who depend on technology to live, learn and work independently, thank you for your interest in and support of this critically important program.

ASSOCIATION OF TECH ACT PROJECTS
MEMBERSHIP LIST
SEPTEMBER 1, 2001 - AUGUST 31, 2002

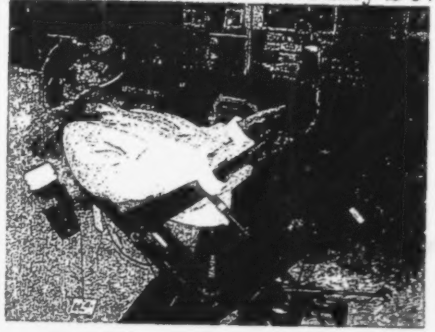
1. Alaska
2. Arizona
3. Arkansas
4. California
5. Colorado
6. Connecticut
7. Delaware
8. Florida
9. Georgia
10. Hawaii
11. Idaho
12. Illinois
13. Indiana
14. Iowa
15. Kansas
16. Kentucky
17. Louisiana
18. Maine
19. Maryland
20. Massachusetts
21. Minnesota
22. Mississippi
23. Missouri
24. Montana
25. Nebraska
26. New Mexico
27. New York
28. North Carolina
29. North Dakota
30. Northern Mariana Islands
31. Ohio
32. Oklahoma
33. Oregon
34. Pennsylvania
35. Puerto Rico
36. Rhode Island
37. South Dakota
38. Texas
39. Utah
40. Vermont
41. Virgin Islands
42. Virginia
43. Washington
44. West Virginia
45. Wyoming

APPENDIX P - DOCUMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN FUND AUTHORITY, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority

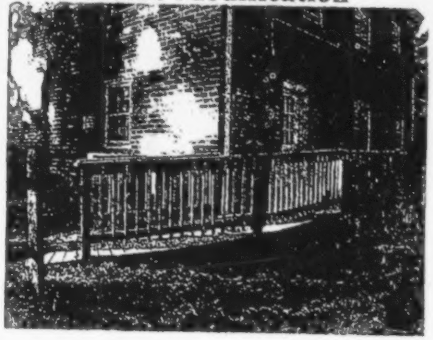
Vehicle Purchase and Modification

Wheelchairs, Scooters & Mobility Devices



Communication Devices & Computers

Home Modification



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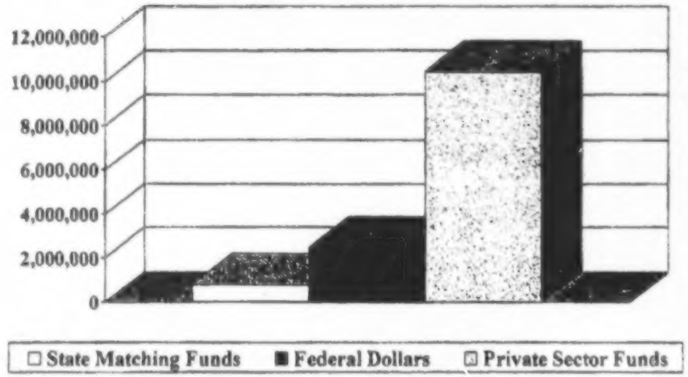
Cost-Effectiveness of Loan Funds

Leveraging Public Sector Funds



- ➡ Title III AT Act Grants Have Substantially Increased Local Funding.
- ➡ $1 in State Funds Matches $3 Federal Dollars.

- ➔ Private Sector Bank Funds Leverage Government Dollars by at least 4 to 1.
- ➔ In Virginia: $500,000 in Public Funds Leveraged $2,855,000 in Loans to People with Disabilities.

ATLFA LOANS

1999-2002

GUARANTEED LOANS	998,826
NON-GUARANTEED LOANS	1,856,639
FUNDS ON DEPOSIT	500,000

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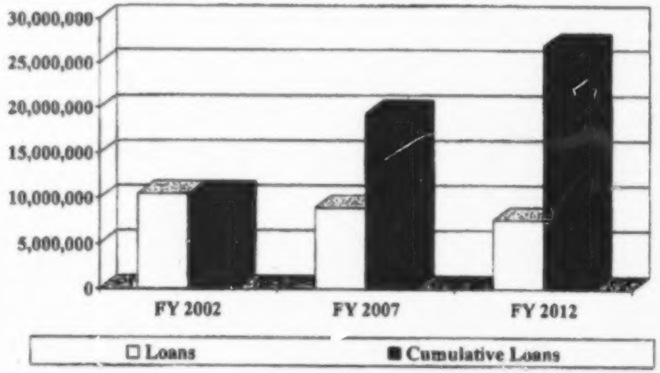
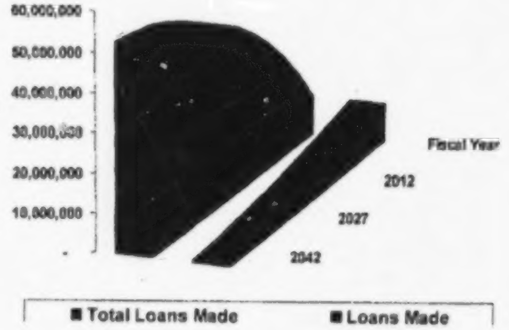
Loan Funds Over Time


Re-Cycling Revolving Loan Funds Resources

- ➡ Loans are Repaid to AT Programs at a 95% - 99% Rate
- ➡ With $10,000,000 Private Sector Funds Available in FY 2002
- ➡ $9,500,000 is Available in FY 2007
- ➡ And $9,000,000 is Available in 2012


Impact of Revolving Loans over Time

- ➡ A Revolving Loan Fund of this Size Lends $28,500,000 in Three Lending Cycles
- ➡ It eventually Generates $50,000,000 in Loans with only $3,000,000 in Public Funds

What's Assistive Technology?

Devices & Equipment

- Wheelchairs & Scooters
- Hearing Aids
- Augmentative Communication
- Computers with Voice Output
- Low Vision Aids

Home Modifications

- Ramps
- Stair climbers
- Roll-in Showers
- Lift equipment
- Environmental Controls

Vehicles & Modifications

- Hand Controls
- Car Toppers
- Vehicle Lifts and Ramps
- Conversion Vans

Assistive Technology is any device, equipment or modification that is made for a person with a disability.

ATLFA loans have no down payment, longer terms and lower interest rates.

The ATLFA may guarantee certain loans the bank cannot approve.

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